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Causes of the 1932 Famine in Soviet Ukraine: Debates at the Third All-Ukrainian Party Conference

ABSTRACT: This article, based on documents from a Kyiv archive, explores the preconditions of famine in Ukraine through the 3rd All-Ukrainian Party Conference of July 1932, convened to discuss the grain crisis in the republic. It discusses recent historiography on the subject and the findings of Ukrainian historians. It argues that the causes of the famine may need to be broadened and that the argument that the famine should be regarded as genocide based on ethnic cleansing of Ukrainians is too narrow. Other factors that need to be considered are ignorance of local conditions, based in part on administrative restructuring during the time of the grain procurements campaign, lack of farming experience on the part of plenipotentiaries sent to the villages, overuse and misuse of land, a dramatic drop in livestock prior to 1932–1933 linked to collectivization, and above all the incompetence of Soviet party and government leaders at all levels.

RESUME : Cet article, basé sur des documents provenant des archives de Kyiv, explore les conditions de la famine en Ukraine par un examen de la 3e Conférence du Parti communiste ukrainien de juillet 1932, convoquée pour discuter de la crise de grain dans la république. Il examine l'historiographie récente sur le sujet et les conclusions des historiens ukrainiens. Il fait valoir que les causes de la famine doivent être élargies et que l'argument selon lequel la famine devrait être considéré comme un génocide basé sur le nettoyage ethnique des Ukrainiens est trop étroite. D'autres facteurs qui doivent être pris en considération sont l'ignorance des conditions locales, fondées en partie sur la restructuration administrative pendant la période de la campagne des marchés de céréales, le manque d'expérience de l'agriculture de la part des plénipotentiaires envoyé au villages, la surexploitation et la mauvaise utilisation des terres, un dramatique tomber dans l'élevage avant 1932–1933 lié à la collectivisation, et surtout l'incompétence des dirigeants du parti et du gouvernement soviétique à tous les niveaux.

Generally, scholarly works on the 1932-33 famine in Ukraine over the past decade have focused on the build-up of problems with gathering grain quotas from the harvest of 1932, culminating in the hunger and human losses in the spring of 1933. When speaking of the “Holodomor,” the term now familiar to most Ukrainians, one is really referring to the latter year. An authoritative article authored by Stanislav Kul'chyts'kyi, for example, estimates that there were a total of 150,000 deaths in Ukraine in 1932,¹ but most scholars concur that the death toll was several million in 1933. This article, however, suggests there is

¹ S. V. Kul'chyts'kyi, “Holod 1932 r. v zatinku holodomoru-33,” *Ukrains'kyi istorychnyi zhurnal* 6 (2006): 77.

value in re-examining the events of the spring and summer of 1932 in the republic. It posits that attention to these early months is essential for understanding the later famine because first of all, the situation in the Ukrainian villages was already deeply worrying, and second, events of this period made the later mass losses more likely. In other words the foundations of the larger famine lay in the political failures and social upheaval in the villages in early 1932, particularly during collectivization and removal of “kulaks,” the sowing campaign, and the administrative reform of the republic (1932–1933)—the transfer from the system based on the *okruhy* to one based on oblasts (newly created) and raions. In Ukraine the reform cut off the relatively close contacts between leaders of the *okruhy* and leaders of the district, widening the gap between officials in the villages and urban centres. Kul'chys'kyi maintains that Chubar opposed the reform: “The head of the Ukrainian government V. Chubar did not approve of this reform, especially during the agricultural season. However, the Ukrainian authorities had to implement the decision of the XVI Party Congress to abolish *okruhy*. From September 1930, Ukraine consisted of 503 administrative units, which were governed from Kharkiv: the Moldavian ASSR, 18 cities subordinated to the centre, and 484 rural raions.”²

The structural reforms came at a critical time, when collective farms were being formed and efforts made to stabilize them, for which guidance and supervision by the republican party leadership at all levels took on extraordinary importance. Yet the reforms precluded close attention to problem areas, since many regional authorities were unable or unwilling to visit all raions, particularly those distant from the regional (oblast) capitals and main settlements.³ In some cases they may not have been aware that some raions were now under their jurisdiction.

The foundations of this paper are materials from the Central State Archive of Public Organizations (Kyiv), available from Primary Source Microfilm (Woodbridge, CT) and specifically a large collection of documents focusing on the Third All-Ukrainian Party Conference, held in the then capital city of Kharkiv from 6 to 9 July 1932, featuring speeches from the Ukrainian party and government leaders, Stanislav Kosior and Vlas Chubar, and attended by two high-level visitors from Moscow, Viacheslav Molotov and Lazar Kaganovich. The collection provides a different focus from OGPU⁴ reports, many of which were released or appeared in published form during the presidency of Viktor Iushchenko (2005–2010). The collection under review here appeared originally

² Kul'chys'kyi, “Holod 1932 r. v zatinku holodomoru-33,” 79. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are ours.

³ The former *okruh* was a smaller unit than the oblast, but larger than the raion.

⁴ The OGPU was the acronym for the security service of the USSR between 1923 and 1934. The acronym is usually translated as Joint State Political Directorate (Ob"edinennoe gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie pri SNK USSR).

in October 1932, in an abbreviated and much censored version. In the Soviet period, it received only one detailed analysis in a small book published in Kyiv in 1968. The Ukrainian scholar Iurii Shapoval was one of the first to offer a more comprehensive analysis, indicating its importance and advancing some preliminary conclusions. Shapoval noted that speakers seemed more concerned to assign blame than to uncover the roots of problems. He perceived the presence of Molotov and Kaganovich as ominous; he believes they had clearly come to Kharkiv to admonish the republican authorities. In turn, the latter tried to divert blame to the oblast and—particularly—to the raion authorities for their failure to fulfill the procurements program, one that had to be revised three times from an original total of 356 million puds, but was still well beyond the ability of the farms to meet.⁵

We have addressed several questions pertaining to the early famine of 1932 that take Shapoval's inquiries further. First, what were the main causes of the catastrophic situation in the villages? Second, how did the authorities at the oblast and raion levels perceive these events? Third, what were the responses of the republican leaders? And fourth, what can be said about famine, migration, collective farm stability, and attitudes to Soviet rule generally in this period? It was a time when collectivization in Ukraine had reached 70% of all households, as the leaders emphasized, but the kolkhozes were far from stable and allegedly infiltrated by malevolent agents—usually described as “kulaks,” and sometimes also as “nationalists,” “anti-Soviet forces,” or “Petliurites.”⁶ Were these a genuine threat in 1932–1933? And how much emphasis should one place on the administrative reforms for the chaos that was evident in the Ukrainian villages and how much on other factors?

One premise of this article is that debates on the Famine in Ukraine have tended of late to be overwhelmed by focus on ethnic issues, the issue of genocide, and the culpability and motives of the USSR leadership rather than on the immediate problems facing republican, oblast, and raion leaders. The main question in early 1932 was how to stabilize the Ukrainian villages. Admittedly the dilemma was a political one, in that many peasants blamed Soviet rule and communism for their problems, rather than the kulak. In late 1932, the Stalinist leadership took extreme measures to resolve the chaos in the countryside and to

⁵ Iurii Shapoval, “III Konferentsiia KP(b)U: prolozh trahedii holodu,” in *Komandyry velykoho holodu: poizdki V. Molotova i L. Kahanovycha v Ukrainu ta na Pivnichnyi Kavkaz, 1931–1933*, edited by V. Vasyl'iev and I. U. Shapoval (Kyiv: Heneza, 2001) 152–164. One pud is equivalent to 36.11 pounds (16.38 kilograms).

⁶ The term “Petliurites” denotes followers of Symon Petliura (1879–1926), chief of Ukrainian military forces in the Ukrainian Directorate government of 1918 and leader in 1919. He fought against both Bolshevik and White forces in the period of the Russian Civil War. Soviet sources often used the term Petliurites, however, to refer to those affiliated more generally with the Ukrainian National Republic of 1918–1919.

bring into line the Ukrainian SSR, imposing punishments and expropriation on collective farmers. The enormity of later events has tended to obscure what happened immediately beforehand, as collectivization reached its peak and the Soviet authorities imposed grain quotas on unstable new farms. Our assumption is that few researchers today would question the severity of the measures ultimately undertaken in the Ukrainian villages. The key questions for debate therefore are the deeper causes of the grain crisis and the peculiarity or uniqueness of its context in Ukraine.

SCHOLARSHIP ON THE FAMINE-HOLODOMOR

A more detailed account of the history of the scholarship on the Famine-Holodomor has been provided earlier by one of this article's authors.⁷ Suffice it to say here that in Ukraine the topic lacked detailed investigation until the late 1980s because the famine was officially a taboo subject and archival sources were unavailable. The Soviet authorities attributed the problems to "grain difficulties" that persisted in the countryside. After official acknowledgement of the famine in December 1987, investigations proceeded rapidly in Ukraine, but until the end of the Soviet period, archival information remained largely inaccessible. The most important publication was a large collection of documents with accompanying analysis by scholars from the Institute of the History of the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU).⁸

Since 1991, historians have been able to peruse many documents, and in the period of Iushchenko's presidency in particular (2005–2010), the Ukrainian Security Services (SBU) supervised the release of other collections.⁹ The chief historians writing in Ukraine on the topic include Stanislav Kul'chitsky, Vasyl' I. Marochko, Iurii Shapoval, Valerii Vasyl'iev, Heorhii Kas'ianov, and others. Together with the transplanted American scholar James E. Mace, who resided in Ukraine from the early 1990s until his premature death in 2004,¹⁰ with some

⁷ David R. Marples, "Ethnic Issues in the Famine of 1932–1933 in Ukraine," *Europe-Asia Studies* 61.3 (2009): 505–518; and David R. Marples, "The Politics of the 1933 Holodomor (Great Famine) in Ukraine: Recent Debates," paper presented for the symposium, "Thirty Years of Crisis: Empire, Violence, and Ideology in Eurasia from the First to the Second World War," Slavic-Eurasian Research Center, Hokkaido University, Japan, 10 July 2014. See also, especially, Heorhii Kas'ianov, *Dans macabre: Holod 1932–1933 rokiv u politytsi, masovii svidomosti ta istoriohrafi (1980-ti–pochatok 2000-kh)* (Kyiv: Nash chas, 2010).

⁸ F.M. Rudych (chief editor), *Holod 1932–1933 rokiv na Ukrayini: ochyma istorykiv, movoiu dokumentiv* (Kyiv: Vyd-vo politychnoi literaturey Ukrayiny, 1990).

⁹ See, for example, O. V. Cherevko et al., *Holodomor 1932–1933 na Cherkashchyni: knyha pam"iaty v dokumentakh ta spohadakh* (Cherkasy: Iu. A. Chabanenko, 2007).

¹⁰ Mace assisted Robert Conquest on his book *Harvest of Sorrow* (discussed below). His first book, based on his PhD dissertation, also covered the famine in Ukraine. James E. Mace, *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation: National Communism in*

important exceptions,¹¹ they accept the conclusion that the famine was an act of genocide against ethnic Ukrainians. Under Iushchenko, the authorities commissioned a Book of Memory about the Holodomor gathered from all affected oblasts, built a new memorial in Kyiv, passed a resolution in parliament declaring the famine an act of genocide implemented by the Stalin leadership in Moscow, and—according to most scholars—sharply inflated the death toll from 3-4 to 7–10 million victims.¹² The Famine-Holodomor in this way took on a new significance in historical memory, adversely affected relations with Russia, and became highly politicized. For our purposes the important factor is that political goals preceded and superseded historical inquiry.

In the Western world, particularly the English-speaking one, early works on the collectivization of Soviet agriculture rarely delved deeply into the general Soviet or specific Ukrainian famines of 1932–1933.¹³ Robert Conquest's major study published in the mid-1980s was the first English-language monograph on the latter topic, based on available materials published in the Soviet Union and the West, but issued before archival documents became accessible. Conquest's conclusion was that the famine resulted from the flaws of Soviet ideology. The

Soviet Ukraine, 1918–1933 (Cambridge: Distributed by Harvard University Press for the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute and the Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences in the United States, 1983). Mace was also director of the US Commission on the Ukraine Famine, 1986–1988, which published several volumes of interviews with famine survivors and a summary assessment of the causes of the famine. In Ukraine, he was affiliated with the National University of Kyiv Mohyla Academy, and wrote a regular column for the newspaper *Den'*, and its weekly English supplement. He died on 3 May 2004 at the age of 52.

¹¹ The most notable exception is Kas'ianov, who provides a critical account of the metamorphosis of the genocide theory in his article Georgii Kas'ianov, "The Holodomor and the Building of a Nation," *Russian Social Science Review* 53.2 (May-June 2011): 71–93. Kul'chits'kyi, the most established scholar on the topic, accepts that the famine was a form of punishment directed at the Ukrainian SSR as a whole, to integrate the republic firmly into the Soviet Union. He believes that the indigenization process sanctioned by Lenin had resulted in an unexpected rise in "Petliurite nationalism" in Ukraine contrary to the wishes of the Soviet authorities. In turn, fiercely opposed to the results of collectivization, peasants resisted by refusing to work actively on the kolkhozes and focusing on their small private plots. The regime considered this an act of sabotage and at the same time overestimated the threat of Ukrainian separatism, linking rural protests to national insurgency. See, S. V. Kul'chits'kyi, "Ukrains'kyi holodomor u konteksti stalin'skoi 'revoliutsii zhory'," *Ukrains'kyi istorichnyi zhurnal* 6 (2013): 26, 29, 32.

¹² See, for example, Barbara Martin, "The Holodomor Issue in Russian-Ukrainian Relations from 1991 to 2010," Master of International Studies Diss. (Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, 2011) 32–33.

¹³ See the comments by Andrea Graziosi, "The Soviet 1931–1933 Famines and the Ukrainian Holodomor: Is a New Interpretation Possible and What Would Its Consequences Be?" *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 27.1–4 (2004–2005): 98.

Soviet leadership was willing, in his view, to massacre “millions of Ukrainians” to attain a social order that was “prescribed by their doctrine,” and the Communist Party was the instrument of terror.¹⁴ Conquest gave equal weight to both the party’s assault on the peasantry and its clash with Ukrainian nationalist sentiment, concluding that “it certainly appears that a charge of genocide lies against the Soviet Union for its actions in the Ukraine,” citing Rafael Lemkin who authored the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide in 1948.¹⁵ Conquest’s book did not satisfy all critics, mainly because of his choice of sources, some of which were clearly anti-Soviet in nature.¹⁶

Two works by the same author exemplify modified and contrary conclusions to those reached by Conquest. In his short book published in the mid-1990s, Italian scholar Andrea Graziosi denied that the famine was pre-meditated, but maintained that the struggle between the authorities and peasants took on particularly intense characteristics as a result of national, ethnic, and religious factors. Once the famine struck these regions, “it was used to ‘punish’ the inhabitants of the areas which had opposed with the greatest resistance against the regime’s policies,” among which the preeminent region was clearly Ukraine. Stalin deployed famine as a means of punishment, and at the same time to eliminate a “natural breeding ground” of Ukrainian nationalism.¹⁷ Graziosi subsequently changed his interpretation considerably in a pioneering article that argued for the uniqueness of the Ukrainian case (and also the Kazakh one but for different reasons) and tried to combine two different interpretations of the famine, namely those that support the genocide theory (Group A) and those that see a variety of causes (Group B). He maintained also that there were two famines rather than one—the first, starting in the winter of 1931–1932 and continuing into the spring, and a second more lethal one starting after September 1932, imposed especially harshly on Ukraine because Ukrainians represented in Stalin’s mind a threat to the stability of his regime.¹⁸

Graziosi’s conclusion is that if one takes, as Lemkin did, the 1948 UN definition of genocide, then Stalin’s oppression of the peasantry was in Ukraine’s case, an anti-Ukrainian policy “aimed at mass extermination and causing genocide.” As evidence he cites the extreme measures taken in Ukraine following the 1932 party conference, the grain requisitions campaign,

¹⁴ Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (London: Hutchinson, 1986) 344.

¹⁵ Conquest 272.

¹⁶ See, for example, J. Arch Getty, “Starving the Ukraine,” *London Review of Books* 9.2 22 January 1987: <www.lrb.co.uk/v09/n02/j-arch-getty/starving-the-ukraine> (Accessed 2 July 2014).

¹⁷ Andrea Graziosi, *The Great Peasant War: Bolsheviks and Peasants, 1917–1933* (Cambridge: Harvard Papers in Ukrainian Studies, 1996) 65, 67.

¹⁸ Graziosi, “The Soviet 1931–1933 Famines and the Ukrainian Holodomor,” 99–100.

restrictions on peasant movement, the ending of Ukrainianization in Russia,¹⁹ repressions of local officials and deportations of peasants, the removal of all goods from stores, and the overall number of victims, which was far higher than elsewhere in the Soviet Union in 1933.²⁰ Graziosi's revised views put him firmly into his own designation of category A scholars, i.e., those who believe that the famine must be considered an act of genocide. Whether or not his article reconciled opposing viewpoints on the Famine/Holodomor, however, is uncertain. The evidence would suggest otherwise.²¹

By far the most comprehensive study of the Soviet famines in the early 1930s—both in English and other languages—is that of R.W. Davies and Stephen G. Wheatcroft, in what has been generally recognized as an authoritative work. They maintain that the basic cause of the decline of farming in the USSR in 1928–1933 was the “unremitting state pressure on rural resources.” They perceive four groups of problems. First, they cite the over-extension of sown area, which ended the process of crop rotation and was particularly destructive in Ukraine. The other three factors are the decline in draft animal power, the low quality of cultivation work, and poor weather conditions. In terms of causes and motivations they disagree with Conquest that Stalin wanted a famine and that it was deliberately inflicted on Ukraine. They assert that although ideological factors cannot be completely discounted, the famine (they perceive only one) was caused by the misguided policies of the Soviet leaders, the results of which were neither predicted nor wanted. Those with responsibility for agriculture were largely ignorant about it, and their frenetic policies were a consequence of the policy of crash industrialization.²²

Prior to the convening of the Ukrainian Party Conference, a litany of problems—some now familiar to historians of the Famine of 1932–1933—were in evidence. They included the mass exodus of peasants from farms starting in the spring of 1932, in search of food and employment, and clustering around railway stations hoping to barter personal belongings for train tickets.²³ Already

¹⁹ This refers to Ukrainian ethnic regions of Russia such as the Kuban region of the North Caucasus, in which more than 50% of the population identified itself as ethnic Ukrainians in the early 1930s.

²⁰ Graziosi, “The Soviet 1931–1933 Famines and the Ukrainian Holodomor,” especially 104–107.

²¹ See, for example, Stephen G. Wheatcroft, “Causation and Responsibility in the Holodomor Tragedy,” *Holodomor Studies* 1.2 (2009): 22–27.

²² R. W. Davies and Stephen G. Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger: Soviet Agriculture, 1931–1933. The Industrialization of Soviet Russia*, vol. 5 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 434–440.

²³ Other sources confirm the acute situation in both Babans'kyi and Umans'kyi raions of Vinnytsia Oblast. In the former, the entire district suffered from famine; in the latter, it encompassed 36 of 39 villages. See, for example, the report of the special correspondent

by this time an unusual phenomenon had occurred. Farms in Belarus, an area not known for grain production, were sending food to starving villages of Ukraine and dealing with masses of hungry and emaciated migrants from the southern republic.²⁴ There was evidence of protest and anger at the central authorities in Moscow and in Kyiv—Stalin and Kosior were specifically addressed in letters—for their neglect of Ukraine.²⁵ Even households that had completed sufficient labour days were reportedly starving.²⁶ Many reports emphasize the vulnerability of children to malnutrition and disease in the spring of 1932. Some fell victim to acts of cannibalism, which are cited frequently in reports.²⁷ Before turning specifically to the conference, its reports, and discussions, it is worthwhile turning to the archival reports that deal with three questions that have been at the centre of scholarly discussions on the key causes of the famine: grain procurements, losses of draft animals (both cited by Davies and Wheatcroft), and evidence of national disaffection and protests.

HARVEST AND GRAIN PROCUREMENTS

Two key points are evident about the harvest and procurement situation in Ukraine in 1932. First, collective farms were in a chaotic and disorganized state, often lacking in personnel and unable to carry out the basic requirements of farming. A key element in local difficulties was the lack of draft animals, especially horses, many of which had died or were unfit for work. Second, grain procurements, which had been set at very high levels immediately after collectivization and continued to rise, were lowered somewhat in 1932 when the disastrous results of the spring sowing campaign became evident. They were still well beyond Ukrainian farms' means to pay, however.

Accounts of mismanagement of kolkhoz affairs are very numerous in the spring of 1932. In general, the worst situations were in Vinnytsia, Kharkiv, and Kyiv oblasts. Vinnytsia Oblast was lacking tractors for the sowing campaign.²⁸ Secretary Alekseev signed a decree of the oblast committee, stating that during

of the newspaper *Za pishchevuiu industriiu*, Kovaliov, dated 27 June 1932, made available through the project, "Istoricheskie Materialy," at: <<http://istmat.info/node/25287>> (Accessed 9 August 2013). The presence of starving peasants at railway stations had already been noted in the summer of 1932 by the Canadian wheat expert Andrew Cairns, as well as the British Embassy in Moscow. See Stanislav Kul'chys'kyi, *Ukraina mizh dvoma viinamy (1921–1939 rr.)* (Kyiv: Al'ternatyvy, 1999) 174.

²⁴ Holodomor (Micorform): Famine in Ukraine, 1932-1933: from the Central State Archive of Public Organizations, Kiev (Woodbridge, CT: Primary Source Microform, 2004) (hereafter CSAPO) f. 1, op. 20, d. 5255 (16 July 1932), ll. 68–69.

²⁵ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 5255 (16 May 1932), ll. 26–27.

²⁶ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 5255 (16 February 1932), ll. 5–6.

²⁷ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 5255 (30 May 1932), l. 50.

²⁸ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 5255 (4–5 April 1932), l. 21.

the previous year's harvest, local officials had failed to ensure the quality of grain threshing, resulting in the loss of about half the crop. The new leadership (after a round of purges) had failed to correct the situation and had assigned grain quotas on collective farms based on the size of the household plot prior to joining the kolkhoz. The mistakes had led to shocking results and only 2.9% of seed materials had been gathered. One raion party secretary had been dismissed for "right-wing opportunism during grain procurement," along with the chair of the inspection committee.²⁹ Herashchenko, from Umans'kyi Raion, noted the high turnover of personnel and the departure from the villages of the most capable people in brigades. In some areas children had replaced adults working in the fields.³⁰

In Kharkiv, Secretary of the Oblast Party Committee Roman Terekhov reported to CPU leader Stanislav Kosior that the severe situation in the raions was imperilling fieldwork and weeding, delaying the preparation of fallow fields, and readiness for the harvest. On many farms the main issue was absenteeism—about 50% of the farmers carried out no work.³¹ Perhaps the most difficult situation was in Karlivs'kyi Raion, where preparation for the harvest was undermined by a "sour political mood." Some 11,700 hectares of sugar beet had not been cultivated and the crop could be considered lost. One recommendation was to give some grain to collective farmers who otherwise would likely steal winter crops. In some neighbouring raions, the authorities referred to what was termed "cow hysteria": peasants were taking cows out of collective and dairy farms. In addition, the number of requests to withdraw from kolkhozes was growing. In some areas, peasants had begun to take horses out of them. Others were stealing agricultural tools from collective farms in order to set up their own private farms. When confronted, peasants would threaten the authorities with pitchforks.³²

Regarding the overall situation for agriculture in the Ukrainian SSR, in the summer of 1932, 70% of households and 76% of land had been collectivized, though it is evident that many of the kolkhozes existed more on paper than in reality. Ukraine's collective farms could lease machinery from the 477 Machine-Tractor Stations (roughly equivalent to the number of raions), with 18,700 tractors. The grain procurement quota had risen since the 1920s: in 1926, Ukraine delivered 260 million puds of grain to the state. In 1929, the figure was set at 300 million, with a target of 364 million by 1930, and, unrealistically, almost 440 million by 1931. Since Ukraine had failed to meet the latter figure and provided the state with only 395 million puds, the Soviet authorities reduced

²⁹ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 5255 (4–5 April 1932), l. 22.

³⁰ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 5255 (30 May 1932), l. 50.

³¹ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 5255 (4 June 1932), l. 55.

³² CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 5255 (14 June 1932), l. 65.

the 1932 grain procurement quota to 356 million.³³ The problem was that some two million hectares of fields had not been sown.³⁴ Terekhov noted that the plan for 356 million puds did not come out of thin air, but was based on a thorough analysis of the economic situation in Ukraine, yet most of the plowing was undertaken by youths of fourteen to seventeen. Older people were disinterested because they could only receive half a labour day for such work.³⁵

LOSSES OF DRAFT ANIMALS

The alarming drop in the number of draft animals, especially horses, affected the peasants' capacity to farm. In Vinnytsia Oblast, Alekseev reported to Kosior in early April 1932, in Babans'kyi, Pilsovs'kyi, and Umans'kyi raions, over 5,500 horses had died.³⁶ In Tal'nivs'kyi Raion (Kyiv Oblast), during the winter and early spring, 10–30% of horses had died in some villages. Horses were being fed straw, he stated, in the absence of more solid food. About 35% of the horses remaining were reportedly unfit for work.³⁷ Kosior himself noted that between 1 June 1931 and 1 June 1932, "almost all" horses in Kyiv Oblast had died—about 203,000—as well as 169,000 out of 400,000 horses in Odesa Oblast, and 153,000 in total in Dnipropetrovsk. In the other regions, there were villages in which 50–60%, and sometimes as many as 90% of horses had perished.³⁸ The situation was little better with cattle, though they were not dying in such large numbers. Rather they were collectivized forcibly and then many had to be returned to their original owners. Thus by 1 February 1932, some 520,000 had been moved to kolkhozes, but by early July, up to 60,000 had been handed back. On dairy farms, farmers who formerly owned cows now had nothing. Meanwhile collective farm leaders—the chair of the village council and the collective farm chairman—had ample milk at their disposal.³⁹

Slaughter of livestock by peasants prior to and during collectivization was a factor common to farming areas of the Soviet Union. Davies and Wheatcroft calculate that the biggest drop in horses (25.2%) occurred in the years 1931–1932,⁴⁰ although they do not compare losses in Ukraine to those of other

³³ A detailed chart of grain procurement collections of 1931 in Ukraine and the plans for 1932 is provided in *Holodomor 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukrainsi: dokumenty i materialy*, edited by Ruslan Pyrih (Kyiv: Kyiv Mohyla Academy, 2007) 242, which reproduces a copy of the Plan of Grain Procurement for the Ukrainian SSR in 1932, dated 10 July 1932.

³⁴ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377 (6 July 1932), ll. 9; 11; 15; 53; 56.

³⁵ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377 (7 July 1932), ll. 277; 279.

³⁶ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 5255 (4–5 April 1932), l. 18.

³⁷ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 5255 (29 May 1932), l. 39.

³⁸ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377 (7 July 1932), ll. 150–152.

³⁹ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377 (7 July 1932), ll. 161; 166.

⁴⁰ Davies and Wheatcroft 451.

regions. Interestingly, as the authorities moved remaining livestock to the collective farms, the kolkhoz peasants in turn were leaving those new farms en masse, many heading for the towns in search of food. The mass exodus was also a general phenomenon, not specific to Ukraine. One study notes that from the end of 1931 to the spring of 1932, some 253,400 households departed from the kolkhozes, including from regions that had been fully collectivized and thus theoretically considered stable. The authors do note that this period also saw the largest number of protests from peasants, and that almost half of them took place in Ukraine (24,000), including acts of terrorism and distribution of anti-Soviet materials.⁴¹ The question is a pertinent one and deserves perusal: was there a special threat to the stability of the country from Ukraine, as Stalin appears to have believed?

KULAKS AND THE “ANTI-SOVIET MOOD”

Many reports in the Kyiv archive under study talk about an “anti-Soviet mood” and local activism. All too often when people resorted to activism to ameliorate their situation and impending starvation, the authorities designated them as troublemakers and kulaks. Such actions are noted from late 1931 and early 1932, but they increased as the latter year progressed. One example of the earliest protests involved a group of women in Ustymivka (Kyiv Oblast), who stopped work and went to the village council to demand grain. On 27 December 1931, a general meeting of collective farmers discussed the sowing campaign, but women present shouted that first the topic of distributing grain to assuage their hunger should be debated. One woman burst into tears at the podium. The authorities suspected that the priest in the village had organized the dissent and was a “kulak leader.” One of his followers, Andrii Ivanchenko, addressed those gathered and declared that the Communist Party was not needed in the village, and that Petrovs’kyi⁴² “had seized Ukraine.”⁴³ A handwritten letter had been sent to Kosior, which stated succinctly: “How can work be efficient when the worker

⁴¹ *Tragedia sovetskoi derevni: kollektivizatsiya i raskulachivanie. Dokumenty i materialy v 5 tomakh. Tom 3: Konets 1930–1933*, edited by V. Danilov, R. Manning, and L. Viola (Moscow: Rossppen, 2001) 17.

⁴² The reference is to Hryhorii Petrovs’kyi (1878–1958), Chairman of the Ukrainian Central Executive Committee of the USSR from 1919 to 1938 and one of the most prominent Ukrainians in the Soviet leadership. In 1926, the city of Katerynoslav in Ukraine was renamed Dnipropetrovsk in his honour. In November 2009, on the eve of the commemoration of the Holodomor in Kyiv, his statue in the capital city was torn down.

⁴³ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 5255 (2 January 1932), l. 1.

receives only one meal with meat every ten days, and even this is by no means guaranteed?"⁴⁴

A report from the Secretary of Slavuts'kyi Raion, Vinnytsia Oblast indicated that problems were also spreading to the urban areas. It first outlined how several farmers from the kolkhoz near the Polish border had tried to steal potatoes from the farm. Having failed, they approached the border post and demanded either grain or permission to enter Poland. On 17 May 1932, a delegation had arrived at the raion headquarters from the porcelain works, paper mills, and other factories, and demanded that the raion authorities issue a decree to provide them with bread. One of the protesters was dissatisfied with the reply and asked for grain from the "war chest," since no war was taking place. At the porcelain works, which employed 8,000 workers, there were two attempts to start a strike. Workers refused en masse to turn up for work. The exodus from the sawmill was threatening plan fulfilment. About 2,000 workers from the logging mill had left their posts and work had stopped. In May, the workers had not received grain, despite sending the head of the supply department to the oblast centre (the city of Vinnytsia) to make them aware of the situation.⁴⁵

Evidently in many oblasts, the party authorities lacked raion membership and had little influence in the villages, and this seems to have been the case particularly in the western borderlands. Thus in Sharhorods'kyi Raion of Vinnytsia Oblast, there had been many cases of unrest in 1930, when three villages protested against the Soviet regime: the deputy chairman of the GPU was killed, and the head of the *okruh* government beaten up. In nearby Tal'nivs'kyi Raion, where hunger was not a major issue, 30% of the people were Ukrainian Catholics, and more people attended mass than could fit into the church (the report does not indicate the proportion of Orthodox worshippers).⁴⁶ Party activists in the Sharhorods'kyi Raion were reportedly weak and unreliable, with only two to three people on whom the authorities could place trust. Village activists were non-existent. Party organizations had expelled thirty-four members and reprimanded eighty-six others during the campaign for grain procurement. The authorities had also dismissed a third of the village council chairmen, and 44% had been transferred to other villages. As a result, the population had adopted a suspicious attitude toward party and government resolutions.⁴⁷ The situation was no better in the eastern Kharkiv Oblast, where 609 applications had been received in seven raions to withdraw from collective farms. Secretary Terekhov informed Kosior of robberies of granaries, distilleries, and grain storage facilities.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 5255 (2 January 1932), l. 3.

⁴⁵ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 5255 (19 May 1932), l. 31.

⁴⁶ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 5255 (29 May 1932), ll. 41–42.

⁴⁷ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 5255 (29 May 1932), l. 45.

⁴⁸ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 5255 (4 June 1932), l. 56.

Terekhov also offered an analysis of the main sources of opposition that were spreading rumours that the Soviet authorities had overtaxed Ukraine and that grain procurement plans were unrealistic. These rumours could be heard everywhere—at institutions, among specialists, and at higher educational centres. People asked: since when did a peasant from Ukraine have to travel to Leningrad to buy bread? The answer: never. Therefore the conclusion was that the bread had been taken out of Ukraine. Such rumours, according to Terekhov, emanated from three main sources: first, the “nationalists,” who took advantage of the difficult situation and developed propaganda against the Central Committee of the Communist Party. The second source was raion workers, who concluded that the problems had arisen because the plan was unreasonable. The third source was the “Right Oppositionist”⁴⁹ camp, which declared that it was necessary to re-evaluate the plan. Some “comrades” were trying to lay the blame on the Central Committee, and especially Ukrainian party leader Kosior.⁵⁰

Not surprisingly, emphasis was also on kulak farmers, who were allegedly spreading propaganda that had led conservative middle peasants and even some poor peasants to express discontent at resolutions and measures adopted in the countryside.⁵¹ Mykola Skrypnyk, the Ukrainian Minister of Education, maintained that the harvest campaign was a matter of intensive class struggle. He observed how in some wealthy environments, the peasant could be found working hard on his private plot, sowing thoroughly in his backyard and private ground. He did so because the kulak had instructed him not to think about the welfare of the village itself, but only about himself. Today during the harvest campaign, Skrypnyk continued, there was another brutal class war. The kulak’s voice could be heard urging collective farm workers not to exert themselves, and to grab as much as possible.⁵² These comments suggest the narrow ideological perspective of the Ukrainian minister, though he was more concerned than most party leaders about Ukraine’s predicament. The portrayal of anti-Soviet sentiment is unsurprising during a time of starvation and chaos and would lead subsequently to the draconian law of 7 August 1932 concerning the protection of socialist property.⁵³ In the spring and summer of 1932, Ukraine seems to have been the chief, but not the sole, concern of the central authorities. What does the conference tell us about the specific problems in the republic and what were the proposed solutions?

⁴⁹ The reference is to the so-called Right Oppositionists who had earlier supported the New Economic Policy, which allowed the peasants to sell grain on the open market after the payment of a flat tax. Its leading members were Nikolai Bukharin and Aleksei Rykov.

⁵⁰ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377 (7 June 1932), ll. 272–274.

⁵¹ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 5255 (20 May 1932), ll. 35.

⁵² CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 378 (8 July 1932), ll. 112–113.

⁵³ *Tragedia sovetskoi derevni* 453–454.

THE THIRD ALL-UKRAINIAN PARTY CONFERENCE

a) The Administrative Reforms

At the 3rd All-Ukrainian Party Conference, which was attended by Politburo members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CC CPSU) Molotov and Kaganovich, Kosior offered the main speech, after which other delegates responded. Molotov spoke toward the end. Kosior attempted to provide explanations for the catastrophic situation that had developed, yet at times the meeting degenerated into sloganeering and propaganda that bore little relation to the daily issues faced in the rural communities. On the other hand, of all the major leaders who spoke, Kosior appeared to adopt the frankest response, though these comments were interspersed with ritualistic statements, most likely because he felt intimidated by the presence of Stalin's two representatives and he was quick to divert blame insofar as possible to lower level functionaries.⁵⁴ At the other end of the hierarchy, raion representatives often provided interjections and sarcastic comments, or else they complained about repressive measures taken by officials from outside the village, emboldened perhaps by a situation of total despair.

Kosior and several other speakers turned attention to one question that was unique to the republic in 1932, namely the administrative transfer to the system of regions and districts (oblasts and raions), which took place alongside collectivization and the removal of kulak households from the villages. The Ukrainian party leader commented that the newly founded oblast organizations had failed to pay due attention to agriculture. The situation had been corrected in the former Odesa *okruh*, but major difficulties had occurred in formerly problem-free districts such as Kyiv and Vinnytsia oblasts. A big issue was the isolation of many raions, meaning that the local officials could not directly supervise them.⁵⁵ Kosior did not, however, offer any solutions to the problems caused by the restructuring of the Ukrainian SSR, partly because it was still continuing, and lasted for many years beyond the collectivization and famine period, and no doubt partly because he had no authority to question decisions made by the Moscow centre.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Shapoval reminds us that Kosior was also a member of the CC CPSU, which is reflected in the content and even the tone of his speech. Shapoval 153.

⁵⁵ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377 (6 July 1932), l. 33.

⁵⁶ The topic of administrative change is under-researched. Davies and Wheatcroft make two references to it. They note the importance of this administrative change, i.e., the abolition of the *okruhy* and establishment of seven oblasts in Ukraine in the period 1931–1933, observing that between 1930 and the start of 1932, the Ukrainian republican authorities were directly responsible for the Ukrainian raions: “a Herculean and ridiculous task.” They point out later that the elimination of the *okruhy* removed the link between the regions (oblasts) and the districts (raions) so that the raions fell directly under the control of the CC CPU and Ukrainian government in Kharkiv—the oblast system not being yet properly established. Davies and Wheatcroft 99.

Other speakers joined the discussion on the second day of the conference. One delegate named Ananchenko commented that the old *okruh* administrative system was better than the new one. Since its elimination, planning organs had been unable to supervise raions effectively. The procurement plan assigned to Ukraine was attainable. But planning at the raion level was more like bargaining. Some raions received the lowest plans possible; others faced impossible tasks. As a result, many of the plans had to be changed in midstream, which brought chaos and benefited class enemies.⁵⁷ Comrade Sherstov, Secretary of Drabiv's'kyi Raion (Kyiv Oblast) stated that Kosior had been correct when he declared that the central organs were unfamiliar with the collective farms and raions. In the raion in which he used to work (Olevs'kyi, close to the Polish border), there was nothing but trees and stony ground. But the local leaders there had received an order from the USSR People's Commissariat of Supplies (*Narkomsnab*) to send carrots and cabbage to Leningrad within twenty-four hours. They had grown neither of these vegetables. Several days later, the OGPU summoned representatives of the procurement organs and asked why these orders had not been fulfilled. In fact this raion received all its food supplies for military units and workers from the outside.⁵⁸

The litany of complaints about structural reform continued as the conference entered its second day. Comrade Ialov from Rubezhans'kyi Raion noted that the 16th Party Congress (1930) had established the new oblasts. But it was now evident to all that the oblast apparatus was too large. Attention had to be paid urgently to the raions, which would decide the fate of the rural economy.⁵⁹ Another speaker, Comrade Kinzhala, believed that the decision to form the oblasts was correct, because the main goal was to create favorable conditions for the raions. And setting up the oblasts was a way to provide better supervision of the raions. But when problems arose, oblast leaders had a tendency to run from the raion to the oblast centre or to the capital city (Kharkiv), rather than remaining in the raion. Village secretaries also received no salary whereas their counterparts in the towns were receiving R400–500. Why, Kinzhala asked, do I need to steal money to pay them some wages? He added that there was no money in the raion coffers because of failures of the financial department⁶⁰ (he did not specify which department he had in mind).

Comrade Nestreuv from Zaporizhzhia Oblast maintained that the administrative reform was incomplete. It was important that each party secretary be familiar with every brigade leader. But there were sixty-two village councils in Zaporizhzhia and it was difficult to control them. The other issue concerned

⁵⁷ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377 (7 July 1932), l. 183.

⁵⁸ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377 (7 July 1932), l. 211.

⁵⁹ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377 (7 July 1932), l. 222.

⁶⁰ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377 (7 July 1932), ll. 234–236.

the strengthening of village party personnel. Oblast workers were requesting workers from the raions for other tasks, leaving the villages without leadership, but it was precisely these leaders who should remain behind to consolidate the raions.⁶¹ Other speakers commented that the problem was that the organization of the oblasts had been so delayed. Among them was Chubar, the Ukrainian government leader, though he added that with the help of the CC CPSU and Comrade Molotov—an obsequious nod to Stalin's representative—the difficulties had been resolved.⁶² A speaker named Liubchenko obviously did not agree. In his opinion, many errors had been made in collective farm management. The oblast leaders were ignorant about the 400 raions under their domain once the *okruhy* were eliminated. The new raion administrations, on the other hand, knew nothing about collective farming or the villages. Looking back over the year, ninety-two raions had received a single plan, sixty-one two plans, and twenty-one had been given three plans, meaning that their targets changed constantly, making it difficult to plan agricultural objectives.⁶³

The lower ranks in the assembly came dangerously close to accusing the USSR and Ukrainian authorities of responsibility for the starving villages. Not surprisingly these leaders now endeavoured to restore some order. Petrovs'kyi declared that it was foolish to pin blame on the CC CPSU for problems with administrative reforms. Critics constantly reminded them that there were dilemmas organizing the oblasts and raions. It was doubly foolish to lay blame on an individual leader. The authorities were admittedly late with the reorganization of Ukraine: the initiative had come from Molotov, who had introduced the plan after Stalin had raised the question.⁶⁴ Petrovs'kyi claimed he had visited dozens of villages and the inhabitants informed him that no one respected the law or followed the Communist Party's directions. There was also no stability of command: a party secretary's average time in office was two to three months, and the chair of the village council averaged three to four months. The republican authorities had issued a new law that incumbents should hold an office for at least a year, but no one respected it. Petrovs'kyi also agreed with those speakers who felt that raion officials were not sufficiently self-critical.⁶⁵

In Petrovs'kyi's view, there were also issues with the behaviour of village officials: two people had mentioned this factor at the conference. Collective farmers were reluctant to approach the kolkhoz chairman because generally he was brutal and rude. Raion officials were little better. It was difficult to make an

⁶¹ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377 (8 July 1932), ll. 5–6.

⁶² CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377, ll. 25; 48.

⁶³ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377, ll. 125.

⁶⁴ The Russian republic, incidentally, already had oblasts, and thus the abolition of the *okruh* (Russian: *okrug*) was more logical, as it brought the region (oblast) and district (raion) into direct contact by removing the intermediary organs.

⁶⁵ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377 (6 July 1932), ll. 125; 131.

appointment with them. And even on occasions when farmers managed to talk to the head of the raion government, he would dismiss them, saying: "It's not my business, go and ask the kolkhoz [leaders]." Officials needed to be connected to the mass of the peasantry, stated Petrovs'kyi. He had held meetings with activists of five raions and informed them that the peasants had nothing good to say about village and raion leaders.⁶⁶ The conclusion to be deduced from his comments is that the real problem was both the administrative reorganization and the failures of party and government officials at the raion level. Either they were not interested in rural affairs or else they were not in office long enough to make any difference. They were essentially in alien territory and wanted to leave at the first opportunity.

In his speech, Molotov conceded at least that the number of raions in Ukraine—over 400—posed problems. But in his view this was why the creation of the oblast system had great positive significance. One could ascertain from conference participants that, thanks to the oblasts, "we are closer to the districts and collective farm leadership."⁶⁷ In fact, the speeches suggested precisely the opposite, as Petrovs'kyi had noted. Molotov's oratory then went in a different direction. It was possible, he asserted, that because of the creation of the oblasts and the abolition of *okruhy* in Ukraine, the party organization was paying less attention to work in the raions. Some speakers had mentioned this tendency and were right to insist that such neglect must cease. The strengthening of the raions, which were the main foundation for socialist reconstruction of the village, had to be the centre of attention for all Soviet organs and should be kept in mind by the newly created oblast party organizations.⁶⁸ In other words, the reform was the appropriate policy but had not been implemented adequately. Central policy initiated in Moscow—and in part by Molotov himself—was supposedly infallible, but the new oblast authorities had failed to strengthen the raion organizations, which was their task.

How important were the failures of administrative restructuring of Ukraine in causing starvation in the villages? The speeches at the conference suggest it was a key factor and that the introduction of mass collectivization and reforms simultaneously made the situation considerably more difficult. Many speakers suggested that raions remained isolated and ungoverned, with no contact with the oblast centre, and local residents preferred to abandon their homes and farms, and seek employment or food supplies elsewhere. The restructuring continued throughout the year 1932 and beyond. Stalino and Voroshylovgrad oblasts were formed from Donetsk Oblast only in 1938, for example.⁶⁹ On the

⁶⁶ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377 (6 July 1932), l. 132.

⁶⁷ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377 (6 July 1932), l. 148.

⁶⁸ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377 (6 July 1932), l. 160.

⁶⁹ Although we argue here that administrative restructuring was a factor in the outbreak

other hand, as Kosior's comments in particular indicate, it was not the only factor behind the mass hunger. It magnified the dilemmas caused by collectivization and the imposition of class warfare in the villages. In addition, the isolation and elimination of the "kulak" as a class enemy became a self-fulfilling prophecy in that it created hostile rural sectors because it left the peasants without means to sustain themselves and their families. A brief review of other factors in the 1932 famine, as outlined at the conference, follows.

b) Other Issues

In his opening speech and subsequent comments, Ukrainian party leader Kosior highlighted several other aberrations in farming practices on newly established kolkhozes. One was "levelling," referring to the payment in kind to collective farmers based on their work rate. Collective farmers who worked well were receiving the same payment per labour day as those who worked badly. The consequence was that these payments in the form of grain were divided up among farm members and nothing was left over for the state to collect.⁷⁰ He attributed the mismanagement of collective farms and the catastrophic loss of horses to "leftist deviations." Horses died most frequently in raions where tractors and trucks were plentiful. Because they were no longer essential to farming, farmers opted to use forage for other purposes, which was a criminal act because horses were needed for subsidiary farm work and for military purposes. They were especially important for sowing campaigns. While some of these critiques followed the party line, Kosior was honest enough to note that on private farms, horses were better maintained.⁷¹

Both party and government leaders of Ukraine emphasized the "class struggle" as a key factor in the dire conditions in the villages. Kosior stressed the prevalence and dangers of the class struggle in the villages, which was particularly intense because no distinctions were made between the different "classes" of peasantry. In his view they had become intertwined. Since the party lacked close relations with the rural communities, kulak activities were hardly unexpected.⁷² Chubar touched on the same theme when he spoke the following day. The main cause of the ruin of some collective farms, he stated, was lack of organization. Some comrades began by holding "rightist" positions and after that switched to a "leftist" one. Presumably, he meant that they had been

of famine, its importance is hard to estimate without appropriate documentation. In 1935, for example, there was a partial but temporary return to the *okruh* system in north-central Ukraine, which was again abandoned after three years, reflecting the indecision on the part of the authorities as to which system might work best. In the late 1930s, however, there was no major transformation of agriculture taking place simultaneously.

⁷⁰ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377 (6 July 1932), l. 63.

⁷¹ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377 (7 July 1932), ll. 153–154; 157.

⁷² CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377 (7 July 1932), l. 173.

tentative about forming kolkhozes in unfriendly villages, but having done so they followed with repressive measures calculated to inflame the peasants.⁷³ Kulaks penetrated our organizations, Chubar continued, and in some cases—Drabivs'kyi Raion being one example—even counter-revolutionary elements.⁷⁴ Kosior had emphasized on the opening day of the conference that errors and extremes had resulted from kulak theories about the inevitable demise of the kolkhoz. Even some Communists supported these views, and some boasted that they had predicted the failures, but the Ukrainian leaders must not capitulate and had to struggle to implement party strategy under the supervision of the CC CPSU and Comrade Stalin.⁷⁵

In general, one can conclude that the overwhelming issue for many speakers, and indeed for the local population was grain procurement. The negative attitude of the raion authorities toward its collection influenced their actions. Excesses were frequent. Sometimes, Kosior revealed, local leaders turned to “counter-revolutionary actions,” such as searches of collective farms, which undermined the authority of the party in rural areas and slowed down work. Many raion officials declared that they were not responsible for the current problems, and laid blame on those responsible for fixing the grain procurement quotas. Plans then had to be readjusted, because they did not apply to the raion in which they were imposed. But the raion authorities, Kosior stressed, were responsible for such errors; they deceived the republican authorities in order to obtain a reduced quota. The republican authorities in Kharkiv could not control the situation at the raion level and thus were helpless to do anything about it. “It was simply impossible to check every raion,” he admitted.⁷⁶ Thus according to the Ukrainian leader, devious raion officials rather than administrative problems or excessive grain procurements were the key dilemma, a classic case of blaming the lower-ranking officials who had little say in policy making.

On the other hand, while seeking to divert the blame from Moscow or Kharkiv, the hapless Kosior, who was soon to be undermined by the appointment of Stalin’s plenipotentiary Pavel Postyshev as Second Party

⁷³ Kosior also maintained that a large number of anti-party elements had penetrated the Communist Party of Ukraine. They believed that “we plunder Ukraine in favour of Moscow.” They exhibited kulak theories and sentiments and “Petliurite views.” Anti-party elements had become quite impudent, and those sceptical about the kolkhoz system used this theory—the exploitation of Ukraine by the centre—as a reason to explain their failure to react to what was happening around them. CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377 (6 July 1932), ll. 27–28.

⁷⁴ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 378 (8 July 1932), l. 52.

⁷⁵ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377 (6 July 1932), ll. 28–32.

⁷⁶ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377 (6 July 1932), ll. 25–26; 42.

Secretary (January 1933), sometimes came up with more convincing reasons for the failures in Ukrainian agriculture. Ukraine had almost unlimited potential, he observed: fertile land and an experienced agricultural population. But things could go badly wrong. The leaders planned which raions and farms should grow which crop, which was absolutely correct. But then the “we turn the plan into a complete bureaucratic mess,” Kosior lamented, and officials treated it as an inflexible command to be imposed from above, not taking into account local conditions. It was not simply a matter of coming up with a plan; it had to be adjusted for each individual kolkhoz. The farms themselves knew the situation better and could take appropriate actions. “But we don’t permit them to take initiatives,” he concluded.⁷⁷ Perhaps then the crux of the matter was less the weakness of the rural party organizations and raion kolkhozes and more the failures of the centralized command over collective farming, and even the imposition of collective farms in a republic experienced in farming. Kosior appears to have realized this, but was too timid to say so directly.

CONCLUSION

The 3rd All-Ukrainian Party Conference was unlikely to provide a definitive or single reason for the emergence of famine in Ukraine by the summer of 1932. It was not after all a decision-making body, and the presence of two important officials from Moscow prevented some speakers, especially republican leaders, from being completely frank. Nevertheless, it provides a revealing portrait of the situation in the republic as the first famine emerged and prior to the drastic measures about to be imposed on Ukraine, with the direct collusion and participation of Molotov and Kaganovich. Death and malnutrition had become familiar sights in many villages, and a particularly adverse situation had arisen in Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Vinnytsia oblasts. The convocation of the conference itself was a direct response to harvest and spring sowing failures. Ukraine, which had produced a massive grain surplus in 1930, could no longer feed itself, and the rural population was departing from the villages. Horses were dying in alarming numbers, kolkhozes often existed only on paper, plans were changed mid-course, and officials at the oblast level could not attend to many districts (raions), because they were remote, or the Soviet authorities had no presence there. The rural population harbored a deep resentment not only toward collective farms, but also and especially toward grain procurements that were applied haphazardly and indiscriminately, so that it was impossible for even the most hardworking farmers to receive minimal payments in kind.

Concerning the specific problems in Ukraine in terms of insubordination or national discontent, the conference exhibits the fundamental lack of trust of the Moscow leadership in the republican party and government leaders, but also its lack of solutions. It was the prelude to a massive purge at all levels of the

⁷⁷ CSAPO f. 1, op. 20, d. 377 (7 July 1932), ll. 101–102; 117–118.

Ukrainian party administration, from republican to oblast and raion, and Molotov would return later in the year as the head of an extraordinary commission to enforce grain quotas at lowered rates. The hierarchical nature of the Soviet system is demonstrated fully in the documents. It stifled local initiative, created fear, and undermined agricultural output, as party leaders often knew little about farming techniques and relied on brutality to get orders fulfilled. The administrative reform in this regard was somewhat typical of the bureaucracy and ineffective leadership in Ukrainian villages. Moreover, although the conference highlighted various problems in great detail, its main resolution, which was approved by the CC CPU leadership on 9 July 1932, simply demanded the unconditional fulfillment of the revised plan for grain procurements of 356 million puds, one that proved impossible to fulfill even remotely.⁷⁸ It offered no kind of relief to the starving peasantry and the sort of chaos that now pervaded the kolkhozes.

On the other hand, the materials of the 3rd Ukrainian Party Conference offer evidence of anger, bitterness, and despair, but do not indicate the appearance in Ukraine of organized protest, be it “Petliurism” or “right-wing deviationism.” The migration and attempted migration of thousands of peasants occurred because of hunger rather than protest at the imposition of kolkhozes or Soviet control over the villages. The “war,” if it may be so called, was one waged by the centres, partly the republican party leaders in Kharkiv, but most of all by the leadership in Moscow, headed by Stalin, Molotov, Kaganovich, and others. We know from other archival documents that Stalin would regularly read OGPU reports from Ukraine about planned rebellions and mass uprisings. There were mass arrests and deportations to follow, and the often-cited letter to Kaganovich about the fear of “losing” Ukraine⁷⁹ indicates that Stalin may have believed these reports—possibly that is what the OGPU leaders anticipated he wanted to read and hear.

What is not in doubt is that Stalin decided to punish the republic of Ukraine, make an example of it, and that the results were the horrific famine—the Holodomor—that developed in the winter and spring of 1933. But there remains precious little evidence that the indigenization policies of the 1920s had created a nascent nation seeking to break away from the Soviet Union. Rather the countryside protested the incompetent and brutal policies imposed by the authorities, many of which seemed irrational and unfair, feeding major cities like Moscow and Leningrad and ironically, forcing Ukrainians, who had always considered their republic to be the nation’s breadbasket, to seek food outside the

⁷⁸ Shapoval notes that by 1 November, only 136 million puds had been procured from Ukrainian peasants. Shapoval 160.

⁷⁹ See *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence*, compiled and edited by R. W. Davies, Oleg V. Khlevniuk, and E. A Rees (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 180.

republic. As the conference demonstrates, raion leaders were of a similar view, regarding the republican leaders as incompetent and sometimes singling out individuals. Their boldness reflected the hopelessness of their situation rather than any political stance or insubordination.

The presence of Molotov and Kaganovich and their refusal to acknowledge fundamental problems, likewise, simply exacerbated a bad situation. They were there to discipline Kosior and Chubar and to enforce the revised grain quotas, rather than to offer aid to the starving. Ultimately the goal was to fulfill the revised grain quotas to meet the economic requirements of the country, as defined by the need to industrialize at a rapid rate. They carried with them Stalin's deep suspicion of republican leaders⁸⁰ and would return shortly to administer the harshest of measures. Although we have suggested that the administrative reforms were an important factor in the deepening of the famine, other causes derived from the decisions of the Moscow leadership. In this respect, based on the evidence of the summer 1932 All-Ukrainian Conference, although there are grounds to support Graziosi's theory that Ukraine as a republic was targeted particularly in the fall and winter of 1932, ethnic factors became tied with economic demands. Davies and Wheatcroft seem to be justified in their conclusions, namely that the party destroyed agriculture and brought about mass famine through gross mismanagement, incompetence, and ideological blindness.

⁸⁰ See, for example, Stalin's critique of Kosior, Chubar, and OGPU leader Stanislav Redens (Stalin's brother-in-law) in his letters to Kaganovich, cited in *Stalin-Kaganovich. Perepiska*, edited by O. Khlevniuk (Moscow: Rosspen, 2001) 273–274.