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### Ethnic Issues in the Famine of 1932-1933 in Ukraine

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## Debate

# Ethnic Issues in the Famine of 1932–1933 in Ukraine

DAVID R. MARPLES

### *Abstract*

The article discusses recent historiography on the Ukrainian famine of 1933, arguing that whereas there is today a consensus in Ukraine that it constituted an act of genocide by Stalin's government against Ukrainians, no such agreement exists in the West. Further, Western works, while they may offer valuable insights and their conclusions notwithstanding, have tended to neglect the national issue altogether. The article demonstrates that national questions remained uppermost in the discussions of party officials about the failure of the 1932 harvest in Ukraine and argues that a more definitive study of the famine would be enhanced by discussion of the disparate views and further use of archival evidence.

FOR INDEPENDENT UKRAINE, NO EVENT HAS GREATER significance in the history of the developing nation state than the famine of 1932–1933. It brought about a period of intensive suffering on a hitherto unimagined scale. Yet although the famine is becoming integrated into Ukraine's new national history, its progress to that status has been uneven, littered with public disputes and political dissension, and with no consensus among the Ukrainian public as to its scale or, especially, its origins. In part these disputes illustrate the continuing relevance of the Soviet period to life in Ukraine, despite the material and practical steps taken in forging an independent state. The famine has also generated an emotional academic debate in the West, and no consensus has resulted thus far.<sup>1</sup> Ironically, the social and economic historians who

An earlier version of this article was presented at a weekend forum on the 1932–1933 famine in Ukraine held at the University of Denver, 10–12 October 2008. The author would like to acknowledge the research assistance of his doctoral students Mariya Melentyeva and Eduard Baidaus in the preparation of this article; and Roman Solchanyk for background information and the use of his archives.

<sup>1</sup>Many governments have recognised the famine as an act of genocide, including the United States and Canada. However, it is arguable that such decisions are based more on the efforts of local pressure groups or emotion than on hard evidence. Politicians as a rule do not spend time in archives. Russia unsurprisingly has not accepted this conclusion and neither has the United Kingdom.

have worked most extensively on this period and published their results are much closer to the former late-Soviet perspective that emerged after the earlier period of silence on the famine, namely that it was a result of environmental or climatic conditions rather than part of an official state policy aimed at eliminating Ukrainians as a nation. This article explores the debate on the genesis of the famine and suggests that further emphasis should be given to the national question. This conclusion contrasts with recent discussions in this journal which, interesting as they are, have often ignored the Ukrainian angle completely and focused on the famine as an all-Union phenomenon without an ethnic perspective.

*A synopsis of famine studies in Ukraine*

Ukrainian scholars who write most regularly on the famine, such as Yurii Shapoval (2002), Stanislav Kul'chyts'kyi (1998, 2001, 2005, 2007), Vasyl Marochko (2002, 2003) and Petro Panchenko *et al.* (2003), place emphasis on several factors that appear to elucidate the true causes of the famine: the rapid introduction of collectivisation in Ukraine compared to other regions; the unreasonable grain quotas placed upon Ukraine; the closure of the borders of Ukraine and the North Caucasus according to Stalin's directive of 22 January 1933 to prevent the migration of starving peasants; the fact that Ukrainian officials informed Moscow of the situation in Ukraine and the imminence of famine as early as 1932 but without any results; Stalin's letter to Kaganovich of 11 August 1932 that outlined his suspicions of the Ukrainian peasantry and his fear of 'losing Ukraine' (Davies *et al.* 2003); the fact that the Extraordinary Commission in Ukraine led by Molotov took draconian measures, with its decree of 18 November 1932, confiscating not only grain, but also meat and vegetables, ensuring the inevitability of the peasants starving; the lack of such starvation in other republics, and most specifically Russia and Byelorussia; the link between the famine and the assault on the Ukrainian nation, as manifested by terror and deportations; the purge of cultural and national leaders; and the cessation of the earlier policy of Ukrainisation.<sup>2</sup>

I have simplified these issues but by and large they represent the general tenor of contemporary Ukrainian narratives. Under the leadership of President Viktor Yushchenko, the famine has taken a central place in the construction of a Ukrainian national history, and the president has taken the personal lead in this campaign.<sup>3</sup> It has also served to designate Russia as the perpetrator and essential 'other' not merely in the 1930s but in the wartime years that followed. The famine is now represented in school textbooks, and the Ukrainian parliament—albeit by a bare majority<sup>4</sup>—has recognised it as an act of genocide based on the UN definition of that term outlined in 1948, as an attempt to eliminate all or part of a population or nationality group (Serbyn 2006). Ukrainian historians have in part accepted this interpretation based on

<sup>2</sup>On the question of the famine and terror, see Kul'chyts'kyi (2007).

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, <http://en.for-ua.com/news/2007/03/19/174029.html>, accessed 31 October 2008.

<sup>4</sup>The vote was 233–1 for an amended version of the resolution introduced initially by President Yushchenko. The other 216 deputies abstained from voting. See *The New York Times*, 29 November 2006.

published works in major historical journals, though there are some serious disagreements. However, the genesis of the famine issue in Western scholarly works is much more problematic.

*The 50th anniversary and the famine in Western scholarship*

The year 1983 marked the 50th anniversary of the peak of the famine and was a watershed for studies of the famine in the West. Prior to that date very little had appeared in English in scholarly venues on the Ukrainian famine. A project initiated by the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard University resulted in the well known 1986 book on the terror and famine by Robert Conquest (1986). The book was generally well received though Conquest admitted subsequently that he had lacked sources to confirm his estimates of death tolls. Similarly the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies published a book edited by Roman Serbyn and Bohdan Krawchenko (1986). The subsequent formation of the US Commission on the Ukraine famine energised research work and in the late 1980s it published three volumes of eyewitness testimony (United States. Commission on the Ukraine Famine 1990). In 1990, a negative response to these publications came in the form of an article in *Slavic Review* by Mark B. Tauger, which maintained that the famine could be explained by the fact that the harvest of 1931 was much lower than initially thought and that grain reserves in the Soviet Union were very low (Tauger 1990).<sup>5</sup>

The reception accorded to Conquest's book provides an indicator of divisions in Western scholarship two decades ago when revelations about the scale of the 1932–1933 famine first came to light. Writing in *The Times Literary Supplement*, Geoffrey A. Hosking concluded that:

Conquest's research establishes beyond doubt, however, that the famine was deliberately inflicted there [in Ukraine] for ethnic reasons—it was done in order to undermine the Ukrainian nation, which had been enjoying a unique cultural and linguistic flowering during the 1920s ... The purge among Ukrainian intellectuals and 'bourgeois nationalists' in the Party was carried out much earlier than elsewhere, and more or less coincided with the famine. Furthermore, GPU guards searched the trains on the border of the Ukraine to prevent food being imported or refugees leaving to seek food elsewhere. There are reports of Russian villages receiving supplies while neighbouring Ukrainian villages across the border were left to starve. All of this indicates that Stalin was pursuing ethnic as well as economic goals. (Hosking 1987, p. 191)

Likewise, the late Peter Wiles of the London School of Economics, commented that Conquest had 'adopted the Ukraine exile view [on the origins of the famine of 1932–1933], and he has persuaded this reviewer'. Wiles also added that Conquest might have placed further emphasis on the North Caucasus, which consisted of at least 'half Ukrainians or Cossacks or—worse—Ukrainian Cossacks' (Wiles 1987, p. 45).

<sup>5</sup>Another response was the book by Douglas Tottle issued by the Soviet publishing agency, Progress Books (Tottle 1987). Tottle's argument was that the Famine-Genocide was fabricated by Ukrainian nationalists in order to conceal their role in the Second World War as collaborators of the Germans.

Craig Whitney, however, disagreed with the theory of genocide:

The eyewitness testimony may be reliable, but far more debatable is the thesis that the famine was specifically aimed as an instrument of genocide against the Ukraine. The clear implication of this book is that the author has taken the side of his Ukrainian sources on this issue, even though much of his evidence does not support it well. Mr. Conquest's attempts to document the claim that while people were starving in the Ukraine they were being well fed just across the border in Russia fall far short of a rigorous standard—a few citations from 'The Black Deeds of the Kremlin' and other exile sources do not make the case. (Whitney 1986, p. 12)

Similarly the late Alec Nove, in a generally positive review of Conquest's book, advanced one major caveat:

There is one matter on which one must disagree with Conquest. It is what could be called the Ukrainian aspect. That the majority of those who died in the famine were Ukrainian peasants is not in dispute. But did they die because they were peasants, or because they were Ukrainians? As Conquest himself points out, the largest number of victims proportionately were in fact Kazakhs, and no one has attributed this to Stalin's anti-Kazakh views ... Yes the Ukrainian countryside suffered terribly. But Conquest seems prone to accept the Ukrainian nationalist myth. (Nove 1986, p. 37)

Scholarly divisions on the issue were thus as divided in the mid-1980s as they are today.

As Hiroaki Kuromiya has noted, those who examine the famine from a general Soviet perspective downplay any specific Ukrainian factor, while specialists on Ukraine generally support the concept of a genocidal famine (Kuromiya 2008, p. 667). The development of the debate on parallel lines has meant that at a time when international governments are recognising the famine as an act of genocide by Stalin's regime against Ukraine, Western scholars are engaged in a continuing and often heated discussion on whether in fact this was really the case. I would argue also that the debate has taken place in a vacuum: the scholars in question have tended to develop their own theories without communication with 'outsiders'. To be more specific, those who deny that the famine was genocide do not engage in discussions with scholars who believe that this was the case. This is evident from conferences such as AAASS and from the protracted debate on the pages of *Europe-Asia Studies*. A fundamental divide has developed that has served critically to undermine the issue and at times has taken on a distinctly political hue. Those who have supported the genocide argument have been accused of adopting a political stance, while those who oppose it have been perceived as pro-Soviet or pro-Russian in their political leanings (Dietsch 2006). The most notable work in the school of writing that maintains that the famine was not genocide is that by R. W. Davies and Stephen G. Wheatcroft (2004). It is a weighty volume, replete with tables and statistics, and not always easy to comprehend. Nevertheless, it now serves as the main source in English of those who reject any specific Ukrainian factor in the famine of 1932–1933 and, as the title indicates, the authors neither accept the limitations of those two years nor the geographical restrictions of the borders of the Ukrainian SSR.

Davies and Wheatcroft summarise their views in an article in *Europe-Asia Studies*. They comment that the USSR suffered two disastrous harvests in 1931 and 1932, which negated efforts to build up grain stocks. In May 1932, the government reduced targets for the Soviet harvest from 23.5 million tons to 19 million tons, and an even lower figure was actually gathered. In Ukraine, they comment, the harvest collection plan was lowered from 5.83 million tons to 3.77 million, with the actual collection being 3.53 million. Once it was aware of the scale of the famine, the Politburo issued 35 ‘top secret decisions’ that provided small amounts of food relief to Ukraine and the North Caucasus. These measures were insufficient to prevent mass starvation but they demonstrate the government’s efforts to reduce the hardship (Davies & Wheatcroft 2006, p. 626). They continue by stating that Stalin declined to seek grain relief from abroad because of a crisis in foreign exchange rates and also because of reluctance to expose the real problems in Soviet agriculture. Nevertheless, they state ‘we have found no evidence, direct or indirect, that Stalin sought deliberately to starve the peasants’. They also cite a letter from Robert Conquest in which that writer says that he does not believe that Stalin deliberately inflicted the 1933 famine, but rather put Soviet interests ahead of feeding the starving (Davies & Wheatcroft 2006, pp. 628–9).

Michael Ellman is more critical of Stalin’s regime than Davies and Wheatcroft but nevertheless has reservations about the issue of a deliberate act of genocide. He asks whether one can refer to genocide when most of the alleged victim group survives and comments that when starving peasants fled to the borders of Ukraine, the OGPU could not determine whether or not they were ethnic Ukrainians because they did not carry passports. He cites Davies and Wheatcroft’s figure of a 28% reduction of the 1932 procurement quota and points to the state’s allocation of seed loans and relief from February to July 1933 (Ellman 2007, pp. 684, 686).<sup>6</sup>

Finally, Kuromiya offers a very careful analysis of the famine that analyses several factors. He wonders why if Stalin intended to kill Ukrainians he did not announce the fact, as he had declared his earlier objective to eliminate the *kulaks*. He also thinks that such an order would have been comprehended by his subordinates, and that the consequences of imposing a famine would have been impossible to forecast. He concludes that while Stalin was not averse to the occurrence of deaths, ‘it is unlikely that he intentionally caused the famine’ to eliminate millions (Kuromiya 2008, p. 673). He does acknowledge that Ukraine was seriously afflicted, and that the Soviet leader exhibited suspicion of Ukrainian peasants and Ukrainian nationalists, but he is not convinced that the goal of the famine was to punish ethnic Ukrainians. He looks also at the perceived foreign threat to the Soviet Union from both the Far East and from Poland, whose agents he believed penetrated Ukraine (Kuromiya 2008, pp. 663–75). Kuromiya’s article appeared in June 2008, which indicates the current nature of the academic debate. Unlike some earlier interventions in the debate, he does not dismiss the ethnic factor and his article may

<sup>6</sup>Ellman, however, is completely dismissive of the Ukrainian version of events in a review of Hiroaki Kuromiya’s biography of Stalin in *Europe-Asia Studies* (2006, p. 986), where he comments in parentheses: ‘The notion that Ukraine was uniquely victimised by Soviet famines is just a nationalist fantasy’.

represent the start of more all-embracing treatment of the subject matter, difficult as that is to achieve.<sup>7</sup>

*The 75th anniversary of the famine*

On the 75th anniversary of the famine we have a somewhat paradoxical development: the Ukrainian government has focused on the tragedy as the key event in the history of modern Ukraine, eliminating 54 years of official denial of its existence. Implicitly it is a political issue because it not only differentiates Ukraine from Russia, it suggests that Russians were the perpetrators, or at the least that the measures were taken by a government centred in the Russian capital, Moscow. However, there is no such consensus in the English-speaking Western countries, whose scholars originally initiated the campaign to reveal the famine which had been concealed by the Soviet government and sympathetic journalists like Walter Duranty of *The New York Times*.<sup>8</sup> Does it matter? I would argue that it does because ultimately it is the scholarly community that defines and explains events, not governments and public officials or even the United Nations. What should be the next steps in terms of the study of the famine from the academic perspective?

Davies and Wheatcroft's book focuses on a general Soviet picture rather than a specifically Ukrainian one. Aside from the causal issue, the authors expend many pages discussing the issue of the number of victims, another area in which there is a significant lack of consensus. The ethnic factor and Stalin's nationalities policy are not areas to which the authors pay very close attention. The significance of the ethnic factor in Soviet society perhaps became evident with the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the re-emergence of nations could be construed as the main factor in the failure of the Gorbachev regime (Suny 1993; Marples 2004). However, it seems fair to suggest that for many decades Western scholars adopted an extensive or all-Union approach—often also a specifically Russian approach—to the study of the Soviet Union.<sup>9</sup> Yet the ethnic factor was pivotal in the 1920s as the adoption of Ukrainisation clearly indicates; it did not just appear in 1932–1933. Whether or not Stalin feared the Poles more,<sup>10</sup> within the USSR he was most worried about the Ukrainians, and not least because of the policy introduced in the non-Russian Soviet republics by Lenin, signifying that in make-up they should be national in form, but

<sup>7</sup>One should note also the book published several years ago by Terry Martin (2001), which is cited further below. Martin's position on the 1932–1933 famine seems quite similar to that of Kuromiya. Also, Orlando Figes writes that 'The [Soviet] regime was undoubtedly to blame for the famine. But its policies did not amount to a campaign of "terror-famine", let alone of Genocide, as Conquest and others have implied' (Figes 2007, p. 98).

<sup>8</sup>On Duranty's role in concealing the famine from the Western public, see Taylor (1990).

<sup>9</sup>That was at least my impression as an undergraduate in London in the 1970s. Virtually no attention was paid in undergraduate Russian history classes to the nationalities of the Soviet Union.

<sup>10</sup>After his noted comment that 'we may lose [the] Ukraine', Stalin went on to write in his letter to Kaganovich: 'Keep in mind that Pilsudski is not daydreaming, and his agents in [the] Ukraine are many times stronger than Redens or Kosior thinks. Keep in mind too that the Ukrainian Communist Party . . . has quite a lot . . . of rotten elements, conscious and unconscious Petliura adherents, and, finally, direct agents of Pilsudski' (Davies *et al.* 2003, p. 180).

socialist in content in the 1920s. Thus the importance of the ethnic issue to Stalin's regime needs to be recognised by Western scholars working on the 1932–1933 famine.

Second, what are needed are new scholarly monographs in English to supersede Conquest in particular and to offer an alternative version of events to that offered by Davies and Wheatcroft. This is by no means to suggest that Davies and Wheatcroft's version is in any way wrong or misguided; simply that alternative views exist. Potential volumes are reportedly in the offing at the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard University and the Centre for Ukrainian Studies at the University of Ottawa. At the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, my own project currently has three doctoral students (including one from one of the areas of Ukraine most affected by the famine) working on the famine archives, which were copied and purchased from Kyiv three years ago.<sup>11</sup> There are over 6,000 pages of material so it is not a short-term task. Such works are essential because of the simple fact that more than two decades after the appearance of Conquest's monograph, there is not a single full-length study of the famine in English. Davies and Wheatcroft's book thus stands alone, though it is not a study of the key issues of the events in Ukraine specifically.

Third, universities in particular need to hold conferences that embrace all aspects of the famine and from the widest possible academic spectrum, including leading scholars from Ukraine and Russia. The famine needs also to be integrated into the teaching of history at schools and particularly universities. What tends to happen instead are conferences in which scholars offer like-minded papers under a general title that includes one of the following phrases: Genocidal Famine, Famine-Genocide, *Holodomor* (death by hunger), or Famine-*Holodomor*.

Fourth, those scholars working in this area need to publish articles in the most reputable scholarly journals, particularly given the enormity of the event, whatever its causes. Here are some more lamentable facts: the only article on the Ukrainian famine published in the past two decades in *Slavic Review*, the leading journal in the field in the United States, is that of Mark Tauger, which appeared 18 years ago. *Europe-Asia Studies*, by contrast, has devoted much space to the famine over the past decade, but not one article has focused on the Ukrainian angle specifically (Kuromiya's comes the closest), and none have supported the notion that the famine was an act of genocide.<sup>12</sup> Thus at the very least one can state that the spectrum is one-sided. The leading Canadian journal, *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, has not published a single article on the Ukrainian famine in 17 years.

#### *The ethnic and national elements in the study of the famine*

As an example of the significance of the ethnic or national element in the study of the Ukrainian famine and, conversely, the folly of ignoring it, let us examine first the proceedings of the Third All-Union Conference of the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU) in July 1932, available from the Ukrainian Central Archive. The proceedings

<sup>11</sup>Central State Archives of Ukraine, *Holodomor: Famine in Ukraine 1932–1933*, Central State Archive of Public Organizations, Kyiv. 158 microfilm reels.

<sup>12</sup>In its earlier form, as *Soviet Studies*, this journal published two of the earliest English-language works about the 1932–1933 famine by Dana Dalrymple (1964, pp. 250–84, 1965, pp. 471–4).

provide a good indicator of the situation because the conference occurred at a critical time when the failure of the sowing campaign in Ukraine was openly acknowledged, along with the persistence of *kulak* elements in the villages, weak and badly organised collective farms, and a general demoralisation in the villages. Starvation was clearly occurring already in several settlements and the CPU forum was convened to discuss the reasons for this disastrous situation. In addition both V. M. Molotov and L. M. Kaganovich arrived from Moscow to witness the discussions and report back to Stalin. Speeches were made by the Ukrainian party secretary, S. V. Kosior,<sup>13</sup> as well as by a host of lesser figures. The discussions were notably frank because Ukrainian party leaders were essentially explaining to their comrades from Moscow why the situation in Ukraine had reached such an impasse. In his introductory remarks, Kosior commented as follows:

Comrades, many regard the extensive grain procurement plans as a major cause of the current difficulties in Ukraine . . . There have been a fair number of anti-party elements who have obtained party membership in Ukraine. They believe that we plunder Ukraine in favour of Moscow. They reflect *kulak* theories and sentiments and Petlyurite<sup>14</sup> theories.<sup>15</sup>

Kosior returns to this same issue when discussing the failure of the sowing campaign in Uman region (Cherkasy *Oblast'*):

It is no accident that in the Uman raion the number of mistakes was the highest. Those who are familiar with this area know that one can find the greatest number of Petlyurite and *kulak* elements, their agents, and counter-revolutionaries of various stripes. Our local party organisation is infected in those raions in which we have the most outrageous distortions of plans.<sup>16</sup>

These rather general comments became much more specific when Roman Terekhov, Secretary of Kharkiv *Oblast'* party committee, took the floor. He reported the prevalence of rumours that Ukraine had been subjected to unfair levels of taxation, that the grain procurement plan was not realistic, and the farmers were not in a position to meet the state quotas. What were the sources of such rumours? Terekhov responded as follows:

The first source is Nationalists, who take advantage of our difficult situation to carry out work oriented against Moscow, especially against the Central Committee. It is no secret that

<sup>13</sup>Stanislav Kosior (1889–1939), a native of Poland, led the Communist Party of Ukraine from 1928 to 1938, and received the Order of Lenin in 1935 for his part in 'successes in collective farm construction in Ukraine'. He was executed toward the end of the Stalinist Purges and rehabilitated in 1956 (Pohrebins'kyi 1979, p. 33).

<sup>14</sup>The reference is to Symon Petlyura, 1879–1926, a controversial Ukrainian publicist and statesman, who played a prominent role in Ukraine's quest for statehood after the Russian Revolution and later took part in the invasion of Ukraine in alliance with the Poles. The phrase Petlyurite was a derogatory one in Soviet parlance in the same way that 'Banderite' (with reference to nationalist leader Stepan Bandera, 1909–1959) was applied in the post-war period. It refers to nationalistic Ukrainians.

<sup>15</sup>Central State Archives of Ukraine 2004, Fond 1, Opis 1, Delo N 377, 6 July 1932, p. 27.

<sup>16</sup>Central State Archives of Ukraine 2004, Fond 1, Opis 1, Delo N 377, 6 July 1932, p. 46.

people are saying the grain was taken by Moscow. These rumours persist elsewhere: among groups of workers at institutions, among specialists from secondary and higher educational institutes, etc. They say: when was it the case before that a man from Ukraine had to travel to Leningrad to buy bread? [The answer is] never. Thus the conclusion is that the bread was seized, it was taken away.

Terekhov went on to say that nationalists and petty bourgeoisie both concurred that the Ukrainians had been robbed, that everything had been taken from their villages, and that the grain procurement plans submitted to Ukraine could never have been fulfilled.<sup>17</sup>

The discussions are replete with references to the distinct nature of the Ukrainian villages as compared to other regions of the Soviet Union and the difficulties the communists had in obtaining a secure foothold there. ‘Comrade Chernyavs’kyi’<sup>18</sup> commented that ‘the Ukrainian village is the most complex village because of its profound national character and its *kulaks*’.<sup>19</sup> He was supported later by ‘Comrade Zatons’kyi’<sup>20</sup> who declared that the rightist elements were attacking the Communist Party of Ukraine for not defending Ukraine enough from the intrusions of the all-Union party authorities in Moscow<sup>21</sup> and by ‘Comrade’ Demchenko,<sup>22</sup> who believed that all political explanations of the errors made in Ukraine could be attributed to Ukrainian chauvinism, the goal of which was to turn Ukraine against Moscow.<sup>23</sup> Finally, the well-known figure of Hryhory I. Petrovs’kyi, Chairman of the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee as well as the Ukrainian Central Committee of Poor Peasants (*Kommezam*) and one of Ukraine’s most prominent figures,<sup>24</sup> asked himself why Ukraine has so many problems both in spring sowing and grain procurement at this time, answering his own question with the statement that ‘Our village is a complicated structure, and everyone in the Soviet Union knows it: we have a strong class of *kulaks*, nationalism, and chauvinism’ but nonetheless 70% of Ukrainian households had been collectivised, ‘which is a great accomplishment’.<sup>25</sup>

While necessarily taken out of context and amid a plethora of comments about general farming and organisational problems in Ukraine, the minutes of the summer

<sup>17</sup>Central State Archives of Ukraine 2004, Fond 1, Opis 1, Delo N 377, 6 July 1932, pp. 273–4.

<sup>18</sup>V. I. Chernyavs’kyi (1893–1939), Secretary of the CC CPU and a Candidate Member of the CPU Politburo.

<sup>19</sup>Central State Archives of Ukraine 2004, Fond 1, Opis 2, Delo N 378, 8 July 1932, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup>V. P. Zatons’kyi was a former Commissar for Education in Ukraine and one of the few ethnic Ukrainian Bolsheviks to take part in the initial Bolshevik takeover in Ukraine in 1918. In the period 1927–1933 he was head of the Central Control Commission in the People’s Commissariat of Worker–Peasant Inspection. In 1929 he was a plenipotentiary of the CC CPU for grain procurements in Kremenchuk district and evidently objected in the following year to violations of the voluntary nature of collectivisation in Ukraine (Rubach 1978, p. 154).

<sup>21</sup>Central State Archives of Ukraine 2004, Fond 1, Opis 1, Delo N 377, 6 July 1932, p. 74.

<sup>22</sup>M. N. Demchenko (1896–1937), First Party Secretary of the Kyiv *oblast’* Committee, Communist Party of Ukraine, and a member of the CPU Politburo from 1931.

<sup>23</sup>Central State Archives of Ukraine 2004, Fond 1, Opis 1, Delo N 377, 6 July 1932, p. 81.

<sup>24</sup>Dnipropetrovs’k, one of Ukraine’s main industrial cities, is named after him. For a brief account of Petrovs’kyi’s career, see Ponochovnyi and Shostak (1988).

<sup>25</sup>Central State Archives of Ukraine 2004, Fond 1, Opis 1, Delo N 377, 6 July 1932, p. 124.

1932 conference do suggest that the national factor was an element regularly cited by the leaders of the Communist Party of Ukraine. The brief excerpts cited above also encompass many of the elements of the ethnic explanation of the famine: excessive grain quota targets, requisitions of needed food, and the targeting of nationalist elements that continued to predominate in Ukrainian villages and were turning the local population against Moscow. The references to higher educational institutions in Ukraine indicate perceived links between peasants and the Ukrainian intelligentsia and their collective antipathy toward Moscow. Admittedly, there is nothing in the 1932 party conference to suggest that the Soviet authorities intended to eliminate physically this population but clearly some form of retribution as a counter-measure was implied. The very association, for example of nationalists with *kulaks*, would suggest that there was the possibility that they were similarly singled out as objects for 'liquidation', as well as the fact that 'Ukrainian *kulaks*' seemed to be offering more resistance to the Soviet authorities than their counterparts elsewhere.

Western scholars generally acknowledge the severe toll of the Stalin purges in Ukraine (and elsewhere) but maintain that the peak of the terror occurred several years after the famine in Ukraine.<sup>26</sup> Thus, it is asserted, the focus on ethnic nationalism was not notable during the hunger years. However, contemporary reports suggest that the so-called 'struggle with nationalism' in Ukraine occurred earlier than elsewhere in the USSR, partly and paradoxically because of the relative success of the 1920s indigenisation policy initiated by then Ukrainian party boss Lazar Kaganovich, subsequently one of the main figures held responsible for the enormity of the famine in Ukraine and the North Caucasus and, as noted, a participant in the party conference cited above. One anonymous article, published in late 1933 in a Kharkiv journal, decried the sort of nationalism espoused by former Commissar of Education, Mykola Skrypnyk.<sup>27</sup> It equated the 'counter-revolution' against the Communist Party in rural Ukraine with the desire of foreign powers to intervene in Ukraine, the coming to power of Hitler in Germany, and the machinations of 'Polish Fascists' and Russian and Ukrainian 'White Guardists' backed by Trotskyists (*Za proletars'kyi internatsionalizm* 1933, p. 4). Shortly afterwards, an article published in the journal of the Council of Nationalities of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR noted that one of the crucial tasks of the party was to respond to the mistakes on the national question that had occurred in Ukraine that were connected with Skrypnyk. The class struggle that had emerged, it continued, pertained not only to the sphere of politics but had had severe consequences in the area of the economy (S.D. 1934, p. 16). Given official secrecy about the famine, one could hardly find a clearer admission of the connection between the ethnic or national issue and the catastrophe that had occurred in the Ukrainian countryside.

<sup>26</sup>See, for example, Martin (2001, p. 309).

<sup>27</sup>Mykola O. Skrypnyk (1872–1933) was a leading Ukrainian Bolshevik, who from his position as Commissar for Education, from March 1927 to February 1933, became the chief advocate of the primacy of development of Ukrainian culture in the republic. At the end of his tenure as Education Commissar he was accused of leading a nationalist movement in Ukraine and was purged following the arrival in Ukraine of Stalin's plenipotentiary, Pavel Postyshev. Once again the timing is crucial and his dismissal coincided with the peak of the famine. He committed suicide on 7 July 1933. See [http://www.kmu.gov.ua/control/uk/publish/printable\\_article?art\\_id=1261066](http://www.kmu.gov.ua/control/uk/publish/printable_article?art_id=1261066), accessed 31 October 2008.

A second article published in the summer of 1934 acknowledged that one reason for the removal of the Ukrainian capital from Kharkiv to Kyiv in this same year was to strengthen the agricultural regions of Ukraine. In 1932, the all-Union Communist Party had pointed out the weakening focus of the central organs of Ukraine on agriculture, particularly in the region of the ‘Right Bank’ (west of the Dnipro River). As a result, *kulak* elements in the villages had tried to undermine the progress of Soviet agriculture and ‘to strengthen the counter-revolutionary nationalist position of the class enemies’ (Symonenko 1934, p. 17). The author also noted that *Pravda* had commented that the move of the capital to Kyiv in order to bring the central party and Soviet apparatus closer to important agricultural regions had special significance in the further industrialisation and strengthening of Soviet agriculture, ‘for the development of national-cultural construction and Bolshevik Ukrainianisation’ (Symonenko 1934, p. 19). Admittedly there were other quite logical and historical reasons for transferring the capital to Kyiv, but the critical issues of nationalism and its relationship to the problems in agriculture were rarely far from the surface in reports of 1933–1934. These writings appeared between three and four years before the peak of the Stalin Purges and indicate that the national issue was identified as the key issue in explaining why the Soviet authorities had encountered so many difficulties in Ukrainian villages during and after the collectivisation campaign. There are good reasons therefore for new analyses at least to take the ethnic or national factor into consideration as it was clearly an issue for the party leadership in Ukraine, and equally for Stalin and the central authorities.

### *Conclusion*

Scholars concur that in terms of the number of victims—between 3 and 10 million<sup>28</sup>—the famine of 1932–1933 constitutes an event of great enormity and significance in the history of the twentieth century and one that devastated Ukraine as well as Ukrainians who lived in the North Caucasus and Kuban regions. However, the study of the genesis of the famine in the scholarly community has reached an impasse of sorts today, namely the relative neglect of the Ukrainian dimension as manifested in English-language books and articles. Memoirs of survivors have probably been exhausted, particularly given the advanced age of those that remain. However, the opportunities have never been more favourable for scholarly studies that are free from any political dimension or preconceived goals, based on solid archival research. Today we have more academic institutions and centres devoted to Ukraine in the West than ever before. Communications with Ukrainian scholars are relatively easy and uninhibited. Many Ukrainian issues have been addressed in scholarly venues in recent years: in order of frequency they are on the Orange Revolution, elections in Ukraine, issues of the Second World War, and the complex Ukrainian Revolution of 1917–1921. What is needed now is a renewed and determined focus on the famine of 1932–1933 in the English-speaking academic community that includes active engagement between the different schools of thought.

<sup>28</sup>The number of victims of the famine has elicited as much debate as its causes. See, for example, the following works in English: Maksudov (1983), Ellman (1991) and Merridale (1996).

It is naïve to believe that the national question can be ignored in such studies; indeed it should be the starting point, along with the question of whether Soviet anxiety about the situation in Ukraine resulted in a drastic solution (the elimination of Ukrainians) or merely ham-handed repression that was indiscriminate rather than targeted, and aimed, as Kosior said, 'to teach the peasants a lesson'. Archival studies to date suggest that there is no 'smoking gun' in the field of the 1932–1933 famine and one should not anticipate finding definitive proof that Stalin had a clearly defined goal to destroy the Ukrainians as a nation. However, it is no longer sufficient to examine the famine solely from the perspective of Moscow or agricultural statistics either, because the national question was a pre-eminent issue as early as 1933 in Ukraine. There are simply too many references to the role of Ukrainian nationalism and its prevalence in Ukrainian villages, as well as evidence of the removal of prominent cultural and national leaders by the early 1930s to be ignored by Western scholars. On the other hand, the position of the Ukrainian government, and President Yushchenko in particular who seeks to make it a criminal offence to deny that the famine was genocide, is counter-productive. In embarking on a new series of studies of the Ukrainian famine, scholars have to start without preconceived notions of what will (and even what 'must') be uncovered. These proposed new works in my view would be a valuable resolution for the 75th anniversary of this tragedy and far more effective than laws issued by various governments (19 at the most recent count) that it was an act of genocide.

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