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Observing the Famine of 1933:
The Reports of German Diplomats

During much of the interwar period, both Germany and the Soviet Union were isolated from the international community to a large extent.¹ The former was ostracized because of its role in igniting World War I while the latter was shunned due to its efforts at spread communist revolution throughout the world. Confronted with international isolation, the two states concluded the Treaty of Rapallo in 1922, which laid the basis for close co-operation between them, especially in terms of economic activity. As result, Germany, more so than any other western state, had a deep interest in closely following developments in the USSR.

Both in terms of size and expertise, the German diplomatic staff in the Soviet Union was impressive.² And this reflected the importance that Germany attached to its relations with the Soviet state. All members of the German embassy in Moscow and its consulates spoke Russian and were well-informed about the former Russian Empire since many of them had been born and raised there. Their understanding of Ukrainian issues was, most probably, more limited. In addition to their large embassy in Moscow, the Germans had seven consulates in the Soviet Union. Three of these were in Ukraine: a consulate-general in Kharkiv, which was the capital of the Ukrainian SSR

* This article is largely based on my *German Diplomatic Reports on the Famine of 1933* in W.W. Isajiw, ed. *Famine-Genocide in Ukraine, 1932-1933*, Toronto 2003.

1. For German-Soviet relations in this period see E. H. Carr, *German-Soviet Relations between the Two World Wars, 1919-1939*, Baltimore 1951, and H. Dyck, *Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia, 1926-1933: A Study in Diplomatic Instability*, London 1966.

2. A discussion of the German diplomatic staff in the Soviet Union during the interwar period may be found in J. von Herwarth, *Against Two Evils: Memoir of a Diplomat-Soldier during the Third Reich*, London 1981, pp. 75-88.

until 1934, and consulates in Odessa and Kiev. Moreover, many German companies based in the USSR had numerous offices and staff working throughout the country. Finally, there were still large German-speaking communities in Russia and especially in Ukraine and they served as an important source of information for the German diplomatic staff. Consequently, throughout the 1920s and early 1930s the best-informed Western diplomats in the Soviet Union were the Germans.

A series of reports and observations, particularly as they relate to Ukraine and especially the Famine of 1932-3, are to be found in the archives of the German Foreign Ministry. And in 1988 Dmytro Zlepko published them in facsimile.³ These 23 reports are essentially raw material that is not readily accessible to anyone who does not have a command of German. The goal of this paper is to summarize these documents and in so doing provide the reader with an insight of how Western diplomats – especially the well-informed Germans – viewed conditions in Ukraine in the early 1930s and what knowledge they had about the Famine of 1933.

At the outset, a few comments about the documents themselves might be appropriate. The twenty-three reports cover the period from 1930 to 1934 and more than half concentrate on the events of 1933. German consuls in Ukraine produced sixteen of these reports and forwarded them to the German embassy in Moscow; eight emanate from the German consulate-general in Kharkiv which was led by Karl Walther; the Kiev consulate headed by Andor Hencke produced seven of them⁴ and Friedrich Roth, the consul in Odessa, wrote one. The embassy in Moscow wrote five of these reports, including the secret 1933 documents that deals specifically and at length with the Famine and sent them on to the Foreign Ministry in Berlin. One of the two remaining reports was drafted by the consulate in Riga and the other in the Foreign Ministry in Berlin. In general, these reports were meant to provide a general overview of the political, economic and cultural conditions in the USSR in general and Ukraine in particular. But as crisis conditions developed in Ukraine, the reports focused on the Famine and its significance.

Initially it was evident that the Germans were primarily interested in economic conditions in the USSR and especially the progress of the Five Year Plan. The German diplomats reported that the Soviet re-

3. D. Zlepko (ed.), *Der ukrainische Hunger-Holocaust*, Sonnenbuehl 1988.

gime considered the attainment of the Plan's goals, including collectivization, as its main priority. In order to eliminate resistance to collectivization, it began with the mass exile of kulaks. And it quickly became evident that in moving towards its goals, the Soviet government was not about to take the needs and interests of the general population into account. The regime's only concern was to insure that its servitors, that is, the OGPU (secret police), the Party bureaucracy, and the Red Army, were well fed and satisfied. In view of this policy, the perceptive German observers concluded that economic progress in the Soviet Union was impossible without the general population paying an ever-increasing cost. German experts in Berlin wrote in October 1930, that «one must take into account the real possibility that there will be great intensification of the economic crisis».⁴

German reports about Ukraine were thorough and detailed. Karl Walther, the German consul-general in Kharkiv, was especially interested in political issues and focused on the strength of Ukrainian nationalism and of Ukrainian desire for independence.⁵ He was convinced that the Soviet regime desired to transform Ukraine from a federal republic (Bundesstaat) into a large administrative unit. And in 1931 he believed that there was little possibility that the Ukrainians would attain independence. A major reason for this conclusion was that all the instruments of power, such as the Party, the OGPU and the Red Army, were securely in the hands of the regime. Meanwhile, the cause of Ukrainian independence seemed to lack a social basis, which could transform the idea into a reality. Walther reported that many Ukrainians believed that independence could only be achieved with the support of the Red Army (which, at the time, was Ukrainianized to a large extent) because only it had the manpower and the organizational infrastructure necessary to achieve such a goal. But in the view of the German consul-general, strict party controls, systematic propaganda, and favorable treatment of the military by the regime made it unlikely that the Ukrainian elements in the Red Army would commit themselves to independence.

4. Report of the German Foreign Ministry, Berlin, 18 October 1930. In early 1930 Paul Scheffer, the Moscow correspondent of the *Berliner Tageblatt*, also warned that, as a result of Soviet policies, "the days of famine are already sounding their approach". See P. Scheffer, *Seven Years in Soviet Russia*, London 1931, p. 294.

5. Report of Karl Walther, Consul General in Kharkiv, 6 November 1931.

The implementation of the Five Year Plan in Ukraine, and especially collectivization, attracted great attention.⁶ The consul-general's report stated that in 1931 collectivization in Ukraine had progressed further than in other parts of the Soviet Union. However, this had been achieved at the cost of decimating the kulaks, the most productive element among the peasantry. The question was what impact this would have on agricultural production. It appeared that the radical innovations that were being imposed upon the countryside were not improving the standard of living of the agricultural population. This led Walther to wonder whether, without the use of force, the peasantry would accept Communism.

Several months later, in March of 1932, consular reports from Kharkiv became more alarmist in tone.⁷ They carried news of a rapid deterioration of living conditions in the Ukrainian villages. This was due to an irresponsible confiscation of grain in the countryside, which was leaving the peasants without reserves. Even seed for planting was being confiscated. The reports noted that even bread rations were reduced and peasants were flocking to the cities in search of food. However, in the cities the price of bread was rising steadily and it could only be bought for hard currency or gold, something most peasants totally lacked. Industrial workers also suffered from lack of food and poor housing. In general, broad sectors of society were totally demoralized and the situation was becoming intolerable. A reflection of the seriousness of the situation was the suicide of several leading Ukrainian Communists.⁸ The worsening economic situation was leading to a political crisis. Many faced the coming winter with trepidation and there were fears that a famine might occur.

By September it was evident that a catastrophe was imminent.⁹ Walther wrote that the harvest was far below expectations and people were desperately searching for food. The government, in order to prevent peasants from forcibly taking the grain that had been collected in collective farms, was imposing severe penalties. For taking one cob of corn, the penalty was a year in prison. Taking larger amounts was punishable by death. These were no idle threats. Walther reported that

6. *Ibidem*, p. 72.

7. Report of the consul general in Kharkiv, 12 March 1931, p. 95.

8. See H. Kostiuk, *Stalinist Rule in Ukraine: A Study of the Decade of Mass Terror, 1929-1939*, New York 1960, p. 49.

9. Report of the consul general in Kharkiv, 30 September 1933, p. 102.

in one German-inhabited village thirty-four persons were executed for theft of food. The consul-general believed that because of the deteriorating conditions in the countryside it was unlikely that most of the population, that is, the peasantry had accepted Communist goals and programs. In Ukraine this was of special significance. It meant that Ukrainian nationalism was fed not so much by the desire for independence as by the wish to break away from Soviet domination.¹⁰ He added that the Ukrainian Communist leadership, which up to the moment had focused its attention on industrial expansion, was becoming aware of the critical problems emerging in the agricultural sector.

There were indications that Moscow was not pleased with the leaders of the Ukrainian Soviet government.¹¹ And rumors circulated that Kosior and Chubar might be replaced by Mikoyan.¹² Another sign that the Party leadership in Moscow was tightening its grip was that official speeches in the Ukrainian capital began to be given in Russian.

Further signs that problems in the countryside were growing appeared in January. And they led to a heightening of tensions with the Communist Party.¹³ The German consul general in Kharkiv observed that rank-and-file members of the Party in Ukraine were disillusioned with the Moscow leadership because its economic policies had placed them in an extremely difficult position. The fact that in the villages they were often exposed to physical attacks added to their plunging morale.¹⁴ As a result, many left their posts in the countryside and matters went from bad to worse. Serious riots occurred in Volynia. And Moscow blamed the local Communists for the chaos, noting that many of them had a "kulak" background or reflected a "kulak mentality." Indeed, the Moscow leadership even accused the Ukrainian Communists of sympathizing with the kulaks and cooperating with them in sabotaging the harvest. Talk about the need to purge local Communist party cells began to be heard more often.¹⁵

10. *Ibidem*, p. 119.

11. Report of the consul general in Kharkiv, 24 November 1932, p. 124.

12. Stanislav Kosior (1889-1939), head of the Communist Party of Ukraine and Vlas Chubar (1891-1939), head of the Ukrainian government, were not replaced at this point. However, they were executed in 1939.

13. Report of Andor Hencke, the consul in Kiev, 5 January 1933, p. 132.

14. *Ibidem*, p. 130.

15. *Ibidem*, p. 133.

The full horror of the Famine confronted the German diplomats in Kharkiv and Kiev in May of 1933.¹⁶ On the eighteenth of that month, the consul general in Kharkiv expressed his shock at accounts of famine that he received from hundreds of ethnic Germans who converged on his office in search of aid. These tragic news were substantiated by German agricultural specialists who were returning from work in the field. It quickly became evident that the disaster was becoming much worse than the terrible Famine of 1921-1922. In large areas there was absolutely nothing to eat and peasants were too weak to plant for the next harvest. Numerous corpses were left unburied and cases of cannibalism were widespread. Moreover, roving bands of thugs attacked villagers, taking what little food and valuables were left. The police were unable to control the spreading anarchy. The consul-general found it baffling that the authorities were doing absolutely nothing to improve the situation. And he concluded that under the circumstances, it appeared likely that a large part of the population faced starvation if appropriate measures were not taken.

In conclusion, Walther added that two Ukrainian authors, Khvylyovyj and Hirniak, were traumatized by the situation and pleaded with the Ukrainian government to respond to the catastrophe. When their entreaties failed to elicit a response, they committed suicide.¹⁷

One week later, the German consul in Kiev submitted an even more disturbing report. He wrote that

in the last few weeks the famine in western Ukraine (i.e., Right Bank Ukraine – O.S.) has reached such an extent that it goes far beyond what one usually imagines about such catastrophes. Almost every time I venture into the streets I see people collapsing from hunger. They are left lying where they fall because people have become accustomed to such sights. It is characteristic of the situation that I have received confidential reports to the effect that in the local women's prison alone there are 140 inmates who have consumed human flesh or are suspected to doing so.¹⁸

To substantiate his own reports, the German consul-general added a summary of the harrowing account of the Italian ambassador to Moscow, Bernardo Attolico, who had just returned from a journey to

16. Report of the consul general in Kharkiv, 18 May 1933, p. 160.

17. *Ibidem*, pp. 162-163. The writer Mykola Khvylyovyj did commit suicide in 1933. However, the information about Hirnyak is questionable.

18. Report of the consul from Kiev, 26 May 1933, p. 164.

the Caucasus.¹⁹ This report was forwarded to the German embassy in Riga by the Latvian envoy in Moscow and stamped “secret”. The report stressed that during his trip, the Italian had witnessed the most horrifying and frightening scenes of famine, which was widespread in the northern Caucasus and Ukraine. Signs of cannibalism were frequent. The Latvian envoy added, with some sarcasm that «in Moscow one does not see such scenes... the great lords, Stalin, Kalinin, Kaganovich, etc. travel about, hold their conferences, keep making promises, only the best...».²⁰

The most important German report about the Famine was undoubtedly the document submitted in September 1933 by Otto Schiller, the agricultural specialist attached to the German embassy in Moscow who had just completed a 10.000 km journey through the major farming regions of the Soviet Union.²¹ It differs from the consular reports in two ways: it was distributed to all major German embassies throughout the entire world and it was considered to be a highly secret document. Evidently the Germans wanted their diplomats around the globe to know about the Famine in detail. However, they were also anxious to keep the information to themselves in order not to complicate their relations with the Soviet Union.

At the outset, Schiller outlined the geographical extent of the Famine. In general terms, it extended from between the 52 and 54 parallels in the north to the northern Caucasus in the south, an area which encompassed Ukraine, the northern Caucasus and some regions along the lower Volga. On the basis of second-hand information, he also included Kazakhstan among the regions suffering from famine. Although famine was not unknown in other regions of the Soviet Union, it did not lead to a loss of life there. Ukraine, however, seemed to be especially hard hit. A paradoxical situation existed: famine occurred in the richest agricultural regions in the south while it spared the poorer agricultural areas in the north. Schiller explained this by the fact that in the south the peasants, many of whom were relatively well-to-do, resisted government attempts to collectivize their land much more

19. Bernardo Attolico (1880-1942) was the Italian ambassador in Moscow from 1930-1934.

20. Report from the German embassy in Riga, 15 June 1933, p. 168.

21. Report by Otto Schiller, Moscow, 19 September 1933, p. 189.

stubbornly than did the peasants in the north who had less to lose from collectivization.²²

Turning to the causes of the Famine, Schiller stated that the underlying causes were «buried in darkness». But it was obvious that natural disasters were not involved because the harvest had been sufficient to avoid hunger. Schiller assumed that the chaos brought on by collectivization and the brutal expropriation of grain from the peasants were the major reasons for the disaster. Moreover, it was an open question whether famine was brought on by the ruthlessness of local officials or by the Moscow leadership's orders which were intended to bring the peasants to their knees by means of hunger. In the view of this German specialist, the Famine resulted not from how little was harvested but from how much the government took for its own use.

Establishing the exact number of victims was difficult, most probably because the Soviet authorities themselves did not know. In the worst hit areas the estimated death rate was between 25-50%. It was clear that millions had died and Schiller added, «I do not believe that the figure of ten million, which has been mentioned elsewhere, is an exaggeration».²³ Surprisingly, the impact of the Famine was not as damaging to the Soviet leadership as might have been expected. Indeed, the authorities even benefited from it. In view of the fact that the countryside was greatly over-populated, the great death rate was not a major blow to the agricultural work force. Furthermore, the Famine seemed to strengthen rather than weaken the collective farms because the «whip of hunger» helped to subjugate and discipline the rural population.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Schiller's report was his assertion that in all likelihood the government actually planned the Famine or at least used it to its own advantage. He wrote that

22. It should be noted that communal ownership of land was much more widespread in the Russian north than the Ukrainian south. Consequently, collectivization was a more foreign concept to Ukrainian peasants than to Russian peasants.

23. *Ibidem*, p. 196. In September 1933 Walter Duranty of the «New York Times» mentioned the possibility that ten million died due to the Famine. See R. Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine*, New York 1986, p. 320. Later, the Germans obtained information indicating that in the three Ukrainian regions of Kiev, Chernihiv and Vinnytsya, which had a total population of 12 million, about 2.5 died. See Report of the German consulate in Kiev, 15 January 1934, p. 255.

Already last winter, when the actual famine began, the government took specific measures which were meant not so much to alleviate the famine as to plan it to a certain extent and, where possible, to distribute it in a manner that was advantageous to the government. These measures (the passport system, exclusion from collective farms, discovery of (enemy “elements” – OS) were described in detail in the report from 18.7.33.²⁴

Schiller pointed out, however, that the Famine hit so suddenly and on such a huge scale that its impact was completely unexpected and, in this sense, it did not coincide with Soviet policy. Even the collective farms, including those that functioned effectively, suffered from The Famine. Many of the collective farmers, who were “friends of Soviet power” also died of hunger. In many cases, the collective farms actually suffered even more than did the private farmers. Schiller predicted, however, that in the coming winter the Soviet authorities would be much better prepared for a famine. He did believe that the Famine would continue into the coming year:

After surviving the difficult pressure-test of this year without notable damage, it (the Soviet government – OS) will find it easier to deal with the new famine because of the experience it has gained. The measures which were taken to plan (“planieren”) the Famine will, to a great extent, have taken effect. Therefore, the Famine will largely strike part of the population that is undesirable or unimportant. Until the onset of the Famine, the usual explanation of the Party for the difficulties encountered in the countryside was that they were simply due to the “growing pains” or “kulak sabotage”. But the unexpected extent of the Famine meant that the authorities did not have time to produce a new explanatory formula. As a result, their response was to maintain an absolute silence in this matter because to admit such a catastrophe as the Famine would be tantamount to a declaration of bankruptcy by the regime. However, now that the authorities have acquired the ability to direct the Famine, they will undoubtedly produce a new formula. There are already indications that it will be something to the effect that only those people are starving who refuse to work. Thus, while in this year the Famine was a state secret, it is possible that in the next year it will be presented as a justified punishment of the so-called “(dangerous) elements”.²⁵

In this sense, Schiller concluded, one can speak of a Soviet attempt to legalize or legitimize the Famine.²⁶

24. *Ibidem*, p. 200.

25. *Ibidem*, p. 201.

26. *Ibidem*, pp. 203-204. Schiller assumed that a famine would also occur in 1934.

As the tragedy was unfolding, Edouard Herriot, the leftist chairman of the foreign affairs committee of the French Chamber of Deputies and one-time prime-minister, made well-publicized visit to Ukraine.²⁷ Hoping to convince Western opinion that all was well in the Soviet Union, the Communist authorities staged an elaborate masquerade in the style of Potemkin villages. Peasant in the collective farms and residents of the selected areas which Herriot was to visit were dressed in new clothes (which were taken back as soon as the visit ended) and provided with bread, streets were thoroughly cleaned and badly dressed people were ordered to stay indoors, cars were commandeered to give the impression of lively traffic in the cities, the policies were issued new uniforms, and all those who might speak about what was actually happening were isolated from the distinguished visitor. The subterfuge resulted in a propaganda coup for the Soviets. The French visitor expressed his satisfaction with and admiration for the excellent state of affairs that he found in Ukraine and promised to inform the Western media about the great progress which the Soviets had achieved in the republic. The German consul noted that on the few occasions when someone tried to inform Herriot about the true state of affairs, he and his companions responded «with unbelieving smiles».²⁸

In the final months of 1933, the German consul-general in Kharkiv reported from Ukraine that:

A great famine marked this year in Ukraine or, if one views it from the Soviet perspective, this year marked the victory in the socialization of agriculture... However, even if one looks at the issue from the Soviet point of view, one must simultaneously stress that the number of victims was unbelievably high... The outside world will be unable to understand how it was possible that Ukraine, with its fertile soil and a harvest that was not particularly poor, experienced a famine of such magnitude.²⁹

27. The Herriot visit, which occurred in late August and early September 1933, greatly interested the Germans. See the reports of the Moscow embassy, 29 August, pp. 170-172, of the Odessa consulate, 31 August, pp. 173-174, of the Kiev consulate, 31 August, pp. 175-180. Herwarth later recalled that "so embarrassed were my French friends that during the Herriot visit they avoided all contact with their colleagues in the diplomatic corps" (Herwarth, *Against Two Evils*, p. 40).

28. *Ibidem*, p. 186.

29. Report of the consul general, Kharkiv, 11 December 1933, pp. 210-211.

The Communist Party argued that it was the kulaks, White-Guards, and nationalists who, by infiltrating the state and collective farms, the MTS stations, the Academy of Agriculture, and the Academy of Sciences, brought on the catastrophe. In any case, the harvest of 1933 was relatively good despite the fact that a large part of it spoiled in the fields. And it was collected because the famine was used as a threat to make peasants complete their work. The Party tightened its control of the villages by sending in more its activists and replacing those that it deemed to be ineffective. No attempt was made to mount a relief operation. Confronted by such pressure, the resistance of the peasant to collectivization began to weaken.

The German consul-general emphasized again that Soviet success in collectivization was achieved at a terrible price. Based on confidential governments statements, it was clear that in Ukraine the number of victims must have been close to seven million or one-fourth of the peasantry.³⁰ In the opinion of the peasants the Soviet regime did not purposely cause the Famine but it consciously used it to achieve its goals, that is, to crush resistance to the Soviet system in general and to collectivization in particular. The German report notes that

the outcome of this struggle between the Party and the people has shown once more that the Party organization, which has the great advantage of controlling the powers of the state, does not consider the millions of lives lost to be too great a price for ultimately absorbing the peasants into the Communist system.³¹

The poor results of the harvest of 1932 and the growing dissatisfaction among the suffering population in Ukraine clearly worried the central authorities in Moscow and they placed the blame on the Ukrainian Communists for «lack of Bolshevik vigilance». As a result, Stalin dispatched Pavel Postyshev to Ukraine as his special representative. In a related development, the Germans noted that Ukrainiani- zation was de-emphasized and Russification was on the rise. All observers agreed that although it was difficult to speak of a strongly expressed national consciousness in Ukraine or of a dangerous national separatist movement, nonetheless, especially among the peasants and the educated urban population there was a general and deep-seated anti-Soviet and anti-Communist feeling. This was particularly evident in connection with last year's Famine and the political changes that

30. *Ibidem*, p. 222.

31. *Ibidem*, pp. 222-223.

had occurred in Germany and which raised the possibility of foreign intervention.

Walther stated that in view of the growing dissatisfaction in Ukraine, the Communist Party was looking for scapegoats. In this connection, he pointed out that Jews, who were particularly numerous in Ukraine, occupied the highest positions everywhere and were generally hated. Their instinct for self-preservation pitted them against the national movement and separatism.³² It also seemed to Walther that the ruthless struggle against separatist tendencies was actually a diversionary tactic and the under the cover of attacking the nationalists and their alleged foreign supporters, the Party was actually preparing for an anti-Soviet backlash. This view was supported by Hencke in Kiev. He reported that many Ukrainians actually wished for a deepening of the crisis in hopes that this might lead to a Bolshevik collapse. Certainly in the countryside, anti-Soviet feeling was so high that Party members armed themselves for safety's sake and feared to venture from their homes.³³

There was, in the view of the Germans, a direct connection between the Famine of 1933 and the so-called "Ukrainian Question." Hencke reported that:

The development of the Ukrainian Question during this year can only be viewed in connection with the Famine. Due to this catastrophe, for which the population holds Moscow and its policies responsible, the old gap between the independence-minded Ukrainians and the unitarianism of Moscow must naturally become greater. A characteristic reflection of the mood of the population is the very widespread view that the Soviet regime encouraged the spread of the Famine in order to bring the Ukrainians to their knees.³⁴

The political crackdown that occurred in Ukraine in 1933 was seen as further proof that Moscow was especially concerned with the situation in Ukraine. This explained why Stalin, in sending Postyshev to Ukraine, provided him with unlimited powers to launch a general offensive against Ukrainianism.³⁵ As viewed from Moscow, the situation in Ukraine was particularly dangerous because, internally, problems with food supply provided fertile ground for the growth of

32. *Ibidem*, p. 240. The connection between anti-Sovietism and anti-Semitism is also noted in the report of the consul in Kiev, 15 January 1934, p. 257.

33. Hencke report, pp. 274-275.

34. *Ibidem*, p. 261.

35. *Ibidem*, p. 262.

Ukrainian nationalism and, externally, there was a potential threat of German involvement.³⁶ Ukraine's huge size and population was a further reason why nationalism there had to be treated with special attention.³⁷

It was in the context of Moscow's attempts to minimize potential difficulties in Ukraine, the German consul-general reported on the planned transfer of the capital from Kharkiv to Kiev. Despite the fact that the official explanation was that Kiev was more centrally located, Walther suggested that the transfer was only the first stage of the central government's plans to remove Kharkiv and the important, heavily industrialized eastern regions from Ukrainian jurisdiction and to attach them to the Russian republic. He accepted the view that the systematic de-Ukrainianization of these important regions was a step in this direction and believed that such moves were an attempt by Moscow to cut Ukraine down to manageable size. Walther concluded that «in practice Bolshevism ignores even the most modest national desires and interests and it is incapable of bringing them into harmony with the Communist conception of statehood».³⁸

The Germans were greatly moved by the human suffering and tragedy that they witnessed. After the most recent of his numerous trips to the agricultural regions, Schiller «set his face against further tours owing to his disgust at famine conditions...».³⁹ Von Herwarth wrote that «after the initial exposure, I tended to avoid extended travels in the agricultural regions. It was too heartbreaking to see the endless hordes of people starving to death».⁴⁰ And he posed what must have bothered the German diplomats:

What are we in the embassy to do about the Famine? The younger members of the staff agonized over this question endlessly. Some suggested that the German government should suspend all deliveries of industrial equipment to the Soviet Union as long as the government continued to doom millions of people to death by starvation. For my part, I considered it immoral for us to be shipping goods to the Soviet Union at all. This was decidedly not the position of the Weimar government. Its response was to pretend to be preoccupied with the problem of un-

36. Report of the consul general in Kharkiv, 10 July 1935, pp. 278, 288.

37. Report of the consul general in Kharkiv, November, 1934, p. 305.

38. Report of the consul general in Kharkiv, 10 July 1934, p. 83.

39. See L. Luciuk and B. Kordan, eds, *The Foreign Office and the Famine: British Documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-1933*, Kingston-Vestal 1988, p. 294.

40. Von Herwarth, *Against Two Evils*, p. 39.

employment in Germany. Since it was assumed that the shipping of goods to the Soviet Union would substantially alleviate unemployment at home, the German government felt itself freed of all further responsibility. Accordingly, German exports continued unabated, as did exports to the USSR from other non-Communist states. As this traffic continued, the younger members of the embassy grew increasingly incensed. Von Dirksen (the ambassador – OS) sympathized with our feelings, but he and the counselor, Gustav Hilger, had both succumbed to the selfish argument that justified trade with the Soviet Union on the grounds that it alleviated unemployment in Germany. Beyond this, they argued that even if deliveries of industrial equipment were to stop, it would not prevent the Soviet Union from continuing to terrorize the rural population. I had to admit that they were correct.⁴¹

41. *Ibidem*, pp. 40-41.