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Western Influence in the Cover-up of the *Holodomor*

by

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Abstract

This paper discusses how the Holodomor (Ukrainian Genocide of 1932-1933) was effectively covered up by Stalin with the help of compliant actors in the West. A confluence of media, political, and economic interests in the West was critical in successfully covering up Stalin's crimes against the Ukrainian people.

Preface

Clear evidence of atrocities throughout the twentieth century has not necessarily produced swift international recognition. This was the case with the *Holodomor*¹, the forced starvation event which killed an estimated 4-5 million Ukrainians in less than ten months, between 1932 and 1933, through Joseph Stalin's grain requisitioning policy. Besides Ukraine, the Kuban province, Volga region, and Kazakhstan experienced similar policies, which were aimed at eradicating the nationalism of minority nations within the Soviet Union.

Why was the *Holodomor* not widely recognized for the tragedy that it was? This thesis outlines a number of factors that help us understand the dynamics of international engagement, or lack thereof, with the famine. Some authors have pointed to the Soviet Union's outsized influence in the United Nations' definition of genocide after World War II. However, as I argue here, the precedents for "covering up" the famine preceded the postwar UN developments—in fact, they coincided with the famine itself. It was not just Stalin's doing, either. A number of compliant Western reporters and diplomats, many of whom sought to normalize relations with Moscow, were active participants as well. Therefore, it is necessary to examine these Western actors' role in the international coverage of the famine in order to shed more light on the processes of how the *Holodomor* was covered up.

¹ Ukrainian Голодомор (*Holodomór*) + голо́д (*hólod*, "hunger, famine") + мор (*mor*, "mass death, extermination")

Introduction

The question of whether or not Joseph Stalin committed an atrocity that amounted to genocide against the Ukrainian people in 1932-1933 remains in the realm of historiographical debate. Take, for example, the arguments advanced by Anne Applebaum, who contends that Stalin's policies in Ukraine during the Five-Year Plan of 1928-1933 were effectively a war against the Ukrainian national movement. In her acclaimed book *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine*, Applebaum argues that the original definition of genocide, as crafted by its author Raphael Lemkin, applied to the *Holodomor*. That definition included the destruction of political groups and the destruction of ethnic foundations of a group. Such categories, however were later eliminated as the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide adopted a narrower definition of genocide, as a result of the influential lobbying power of the Soviet Union.² While she does not refuse to call the *Holodomor* a genocide, Applebaum emphasizes that "it is now difficult to classify the Ukrainian famine, or any other Soviet crime, as genocide in international law."³ It was in response to this nuance that Sheila Fitzpatrick, a leading historian of modern Russia, stated that "she [Applebaum] ultimately doesn't buy the Ukrainian argument that *Holodomor* was an act of genocide."⁴ Fitzpatrick's assessment drew such ire from Applebaum that she rebutted the review in a characteristically 21st century public Facebook post saying

As an author who also writes reviews, I generally try to avoid responding to reviews of my own books. But Sheila Fitzpatrick's review of my new book, *Red Famine*, in the *Guardian* on Saturday does contain two extraordinary factual errors which I feel should be corrected ...

² Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, Division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2017), 416-418.

³ *Ibid*, 418.

⁴ Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Red Famine by Anne Applebaum review – did Stalin deliberately let Ukraine starve?," *The Guardian*, Aug 25th, 2017, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/aug/25/red-famine-stalins-war-on-ukraine-anne-applebaum-review>. (Accessed January 24th, 2019).

First her statement that “Applebaum has not worked in archives for this book” is astonishing: The book is based on hundreds of archival documents, some found by myself and my research assistant, others found by other Ukrainian researchers ...

Secondly, and more importantly, she states that I “ultimately [don’t] buy the Ukrainian argument that the Holodomor was an act of genocide.” This is exactly the opposite of what I wrote – 180 degrees of difference. My argument is that the famine fits perfectly into the original definition of genocide, as conceived by the legal scholar Raphael Lemkin. Indeed, the central argument of my book, which she does not ever address in her review, is that Stalin intentionally used the famine not only to kill Ukrainians but to destroy the Ukrainian national movement, which he perceived as a threat to Soviet power, and to destroy the idea of Ukraine as an independent nation, forever.

I also explain that, during the United Nations debate about the genocide convention in the 1940s, the Soviet delegation altered the legal definition precisely in order to avoid the inclusion of the famine, which is why it is difficult to classify the famine as “genocide” under existing international law. Does Fitzpatrick not understand this distinction?

...

Fitzpatrick has other issues as well – she doesn’t like my journalism, she doesn’t like the introduction I wrote to my previous book, *Gulag*, (though she mischaracterizes that too) and she seems angry that, more than 20 years ago, I helped the *Spectator* magazine expose the then-literary editor of the *Guardian*, Richard Gott, as a paid agent of the KGB. So be it! But in a serious review it is important for basic facts to be correct.⁵

Discussions of the *Holodomor*, as demonstrated by the points and counterpoints between Applebaum and Fitzpatrick, reveal deeper political cleavages than seemingly technical disagreements over the definition of genocide. This becomes evident when Applebaum levels a not-so-subtle accusation against Fitzgerald and *The Guardian* that their connections with Russia are instrumental in their tendency to misrepresent the “basic facts” argued in *Red Famine*. The implication here was that the obstacle in recognizing the *Holodomor* as a genocide is of a political nature, shaped by official and unofficial connections to the Russia, rather than a matter of academic definitions.

⁵ Accessed September 25th, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/anneapplebaumwp/posts/as-an-author-who-also-writes-reviews-i-generally-try-to-avoid-responding-to-revi/704110623118513/>, August 27th, 2017.

Such controversies about the nature of the *Holodomor*, while revealing contemporary political anxieties and rifts, can also be traced back to the era of the famine itself. Stalin could not have successfully covered up the crimes in Ukraine without the active involvement of Western reporters, diplomats, and ambassadors, including the latter's intimidation of their opponents who sought to expose the genocide while it was taking place. The personalities and political inclinations of the individuals and groups who helped cover up or misrepresent the famine, who included the reporter Walter Duranty, left-wing or center-left political groups, the staff at the *New York Times* and *Manchester Guardian*, and officials at the British Foreign Office, reveal a deeper wedge in the issue of exposing the truth of the genocide. Some of these figures presented themselves as proponents of progress in the 1930s, but a closer study of a variety of sources, including published and unpublished accounts as well as diplomatic documents, shows that they were active participants in the refusal to acknowledge the suffering of Ukrainians. The fact that individuals and groups who are typically presented as agents of progress and human rights in mainstream historical analysis were participants of the cover-up of the *Holodomor* adds a level of cognitive dissonance to this discussion. Namely, that mainstream perceptions of historically progressive groups are largely false.

When discussing Western individuals and groups who participated in the cover-up of the *Holodomor*, a prevailing theme among some of those individuals and groups is a tendency to slander opponents. This includes recklessly accusing opponents of antisemitism or Nazism and to frame the demonization of the Ukrainian peasantry as noble experiment in which backward masses were being freed from folklore, superstition, and religion. The *Holodomor* was not an accident, nor was it a noble experiment, but rather it was part of one the most heinous crimes of the 20th century that has been ignored by the West due to feelings of civilizational superiority in

terms of religion, economics, and technology, deep hypocrisy in regard to valuing all ethnic or national groups as equal, and a long-standing affinity towards modernist economic experiments which frequently act as a pretext for exploitative economic gain.

In the first two sections I will discuss the historical developments in Ukraine that resulted in its loss of autonomy. Afterward I will address Duranty's early years in Moscow and his impact on Western perceptions of the Soviet Union. Finally, I will discuss how these developments resulted in the agreement of a large portion of Western journalists, politicians, and diplomats to either ignore or deny the *Holodomor* as it was unfolding, and specifically how the *New York Times*, *Manchester Guardian*, Walter Duranty, the Roosevelt Administration, and the British Foreign Office were critical in effectuating a policy of either denying or ignoring the atrocity.

I: A Coveted Land

In the centuries leading up to the turmoil of the Bolshevik Revolution, Ukraine was rarely acknowledged to be a nation worthy of independence. The country's geography prevented autonomous development and left the region at the mercy of European land empires such as Russia or the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Nevertheless, despite being called a "borderland" in both Polish and Russian, Ukraine was separate from both Russia and Poland in terms of language, rural customs, and cuisine. Poland was Roman Catholic, while Ukraine was Orthodox Christian, and during Polish rule Ukrainians retained their religious customs. Russians such as Prince Ivan Dolgorukov acknowledged that Ukraine possessed a border, and described it as a more authentic, poetic, and primitive version of Russia.⁶ However, this was a minority view. The majority of non-Ukrainians perceived Ukraine as a wild land to be conquered.

⁶ I.M Dolgorukov, "Slavny bubny za gorami, ili, moe puteshestvie koekuda, 1810 goda: Sochinenie Kniazia Ivana Mikhailovicha Dolgorukago s predisloviem O.M. Bodiaskago," *Chteniia v Imperatorskom Obshchestve Istorii I*

The reason behind this attitude resided in the soil of Ukraine itself. The Ancient Greek historian Herodotus noted that the black soil of Ukraine was among the most fertile regions of Europe. Encompassing two-thirds of Ukraine, the soil can produce two wheat harvests (winter and spring), culminating in July/August and October/November respectively. Such productive soil attracted Polish and Russian occupiers during the Middle Ages and up through the 19th century. They sought to profit from the wheat trade in exchange for tax and military exemptions for Ukrainian peasants living under their dominion.⁷ Thus, Ukrainians had to contend with the reality that Ukrainian language and culture only dominated the countryside, while major cities of Ukraine became dominated by Russians, Poles, and Jews engaged in commerce and trade. The major anti-Semitic event in Ukrainian history up until the Bolshevik Revolution was the Khmelnytsky uprising (1648-1657) when the Ukrainian Cossacks engaged in brutal pogroms against Jews allied with the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth. Instead, as Applebaum writes, “Ukrainian poets and intellectuals mostly reserved their anger for Russians and Poles – but the widespread antisemitism of the Russian empire inevitably affected Ukrainian-Jewish relations too.”⁸

As early as 1840, there were publications of Ukrainian poetry that combined romantic nationalism with social justice advocacy. Examples include the works of Taras Shevchenko, who pled to “bury me, then rise ye up/-And break you heavy chains/-And water with the tyrants’ blood/-The freedom you have gained”⁹ In interpreting such works, Applebaum argues that the tone of Shevchenko’s poetry shows that Ukrainian nationalism took a left-wing flair, singling

Drevnostei Rossiiskikh pri Moskovskom Universitete 2 (April – June 1869): glava II “Materiialy otechestvennye,”46; quoted in Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 3.

⁷ Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 4-5.

⁸ *Ibid*, 7.

⁹ Taras Shevchenko, “My Testament” – poem of Taras Shevchenko (Translated by John Weir), <https://taras-shevchenko.storinka.org/my-testament-poem-of-taras-shevchenko-translated-by-john-weir.html> (Accessed September 25th, 2019).

out tyrants who dominated trade, as well as patterns of landownership, and calling on these leaders to grant freedom to the Ukrainian people.¹⁰ The desire for freedom partially came to fruition when Tsar Alexander II emancipated the serfs in 1861, leading to a proliferation of independent volunteer organizations and an expansion of Ukrainian newspapers and periodicals. Sunday schools and study groups helped spread literacy and encouraged intellectual openness, mass education, and upward economic mobility. In 1876, however, Tsar Alexander II banned Ukrainian organizations from participating in politics. He also banned the Ukrainian language from periodicals, newspapers, and theatres, granting “subsidies to pro-Russian newspapers and pro-Russian organizations”, which would later be adopted as policy by the Soviet state in the 20th century.¹¹

Limited tolerance of minority nationalities did occur in the Russian Empire after the 1905 revolution, in which peasants all across the Empire, including the Ukrainian peasantry, demanded local autonomy, which resulted in the Ukrainian language being permitted in public.¹² Nevertheless, true political autonomy was not yet realized. Actualized autonomy, in the form of a distinct nation, would only begin to occur during the Russian Civil War of 1918-1921. Ukraine as an independent political entity was short-lived, however, due to the rise of the Bolsheviks.

II: Bolshevik Extremism in Ukraine

The Ukrainian Revolution in 1917 was a natural outgrowth of the February 1917 Revolution that ousted Tsar Nicholas II. The newly established Central Rada elected Mykhailo Hrushevsky, a leading Ukrainian intellectual, as chairman of the governing committee, and earned the support of democratically elected congresses of veterans, peasants, and workers.

¹⁰ Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 8.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 10.

¹² *Ibid*, 11.

Additionally, The Central Rada built coalitions with a range of political groups, including Jewish and other minority political groups. Even the radical left-wing of the Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionary Party supported the Central Rada.¹³

For a short period of time, it seemed like a Ukrainian state was becoming a reality. Indeed, the state attained de facto recognition by France, Great Britain, Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Turkey. In addition, an American consulate briefly opened in Kyiv. The reality, however, was different. The land redistribution plans initiated by the Central Rada failed to materialize and divided the Ukrainians. Additionally, the Red Army, the old-regime White Army, Germany, and Austria were concocting plans to invade Ukraine and put an end to the Ukrainian language, border, and national movement. In 1918 the Red Army invaded and controlled Ukraine for one month, followed by the Germans and Austrians who ousted the Red Army to enforce the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.¹⁴ This was followed by the rise of Pavlo Skoropadsky, a Ukrainian supported by Germany. Skoropadsky established the Ukrainian Academy of Science and the first national library, but also reinstated tsarist laws and sought to reintegrate Ukraine into a potential old-regime style Russian state desired by the White Army. This led to a peasant rebellion which resulted in Symon Petliura, a “social democrat with a talent for paramilitary organization”, seizing power in Kyiv in December 1918.¹⁵ Throughout the

¹³ Ibid, 16.

¹⁴ The Avalon Project, *Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy*, Foreign Relations of the United States : 1918 The Conclusion of the Peace of Brest Litovsk, The Consul General at Moscow (Summers) to the Secretary of State File No. 763.72119/1583, 1534, 1557, 1565, The Consul General at Moscow (Summers) to the Secretary of State, [Telegrams], Moscow, March 30 and April 2, 1918(1), [Received April 30, April 3, 7, and 11.], 301, 303, 304 and 309. The following is a translation of the-PEACE TREATY OF BREST LITOVSK, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/bl34.asp#2, (Accessed September 25th, 2019). The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk resulted in the acknowledgement of an independent Ukraine by the Central Powers of Europe and was sign by Russia. The Soviets sought to exit Great War (World War I). Article 6: “Russia undertakes to conclude peace at once with the Ukrainian people's republic and to recognize the treaty of peace between the state and the powers of the Quadruple Alliance. The territory of the Ukraine must be, at once, cleared of Russian troops and of the Russian Red Guard. Russia ceases all agitation or propaganda against the government or the public institutions of the Ukrainian people's republic.”

¹⁵ Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 19-20.

turmoil, Ukrainians understood themselves as a distinct political entity despite invasion and political interference from foreign entities, which was the primary cause of internal conflicts among Ukrainians.

The Bolsheviks, who were a real threat in 1919-1921, were highly unpopular in Ukraine, where only 22,000 individuals were members. The membership consisted predominantly of urban Russians and Jews. Even Heorhii Piatakoy, a Bolshevik who was born in Ukraine, refused to identify as Ukrainian and considered the Bolshevik cause to be incompatible with Ukrainian nationalism. Lenin, Stalin, Leon Trotsky, Grigory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev and Nikolai Bukharin, non-Ukrainians of Russian, Jewish, or Georgian origins agreed that the former Russian Empire's conception of Ukraine should continue under Soviet rule, and that peasants were not at the proper stage of class development for communist revolution.¹⁶

At first, Lenin and Stalin framed the Central Rada as a government of Cossack landowners who were allies of the former Russian bourgeoisie. According to Stalin, instead of being a force for liberty, the Central Rada was a force for evil, staunchly opposed by “all Ukrainian workers and the poorest section of the peasantry” who wanted Bolshevism.¹⁷ These false statements were followed by a period of Bolshevik rule in February 1918. The Bolsheviks implemented immediate execution for the use of Ukrainian in public, demolition of Ukrainian street signs, deliberate assault of Hrushevsky's “home, library and collections of ancient documents”, and an explicit order to requisition all grain from the Ukrainian peasantry for workers who gave them political support.¹⁸ This brief event foreshadowed the use of grain

¹⁶ Ibid, 22-24.

¹⁷ Borys, *The Sovietization of Ukraine*, 174-175; Yaroslav Bilinsky, “The Communist Takeover of Ukraine,” in Hunczak, ed., *The Ukraine*, 113. “They are citing an 18 December 1917 (new calendar) *Pravda* article”; quoted in Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 28.

¹⁸ Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 28-29.

requisition as a weapon to destroy Ukrainian nationalism as noted by the British Foreign Office during the *Holodomor*.

In 1919 the Red Army under Lenin and Trotsky would again use violent grain requisition, with the implementation of “war Communism” in Ukraine. Immediately upon the Red Army’s second invasion of Kyiv, a policy of prohibition of the Ukrainian language in schools, newspapers, and theatres was put into effect. The initial policy of collectivization during this brutal occupation ignored the long-standing tradition of Ukrainian individual land ownership, which stood in stark contrast to the rural communes (called *obshchina* or *mir*) that were intrinsic to pre-Soviet Russian society. Few Ukrainians desired to join collective farming compounds, and both Ukrainian heritage and economic efficiency demonstrated that privately owned farms produced more grain than collective compounds.¹⁹ To combat this problem, Lenin was aided by Alexander Shlikhter, a Ukrainian of German descent, who created a three-tier system of classes which demonized the “kulaks” for continually exploiting poorer peasants. The latter were divided into middle peasants and poor peasants.²⁰ Shlikhter would organize the poorest peasants into *komnezamy* “committees” whose role was to seize land and resources from the kulaks putting these under the control of the Bolshevik farming compounds.²¹ The committees were ineffective in converting the Ukrainians to Bolshevism, however, and resentment against the collective farming system was exacerbated by the routine arrests of Ukrainian “merchants, bankers, capitalists and the bourgeoisie ... former imperial officers,

¹⁹ Ibid, 40.

²⁰ Kulak, meaning “fist” in Russian originally referred to successful landowning peasants. The kulak according to the Soviets represented the source of all ills hampering the Marxist project.

²¹ Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 41-43.

former imperial civil servants” and any left wing group that supported or worked with the Central Rada in 1917-1918.²²

The Bolsheviks also instituted a policy of “de-cossackization”, which can be described as the first attempt by the Soviet regime to exterminate a specific group of people. In January 1919, the Red Army murdered 12,000 Don Cossacks (Donbass region in present day Eastern Ukraine) and imported non-Don Cossack peasants and workers to replace the slaughtered community. The policy backfired, culminating in a full scale revolt of Cossacks against the Bolsheviks, leading to their brief second expulsion from Kyiv in August 1919.²³

Another violent political figure, Nestor Makhno, a Ukrainian anarchist, led several violent peasant rebellions against the Bolsheviks, White army, and eventually against Cossack allies. Makhno was a mentally unstable person who took advantage of the discord in Ukraine to implement his anarchist ideology. He spent his young adulthood in prison from 1908-1917 for insurrectionary activities against Tsar, and organized an anarchist Peasants’ Union located in Zaporizhia in southeastern Ukraine that periodically rebelled against Pavlo Skoropadsky and Symon Petliura with Bolshevik support.²⁴ Once the Bolsheviks were in control, Makhno campaigned against them, opposing their authoritarianism. Makhno would temporarily ally with Matvii Hryhoriev, a Cossack who also periodically changed allies but opposed Bolshevism subsequent to the murder of the Cossacks, and the two men advocated for a rebellion that promised Ukrainians people a combination of nationalism, anarchism, socialism, and communism without any dictatorial tendencies.²⁵

²² Ibid, 45.

²³ Ibid, 46-47.

²⁴ Ibid, 49.

²⁵ Ibid, 53.

Violent chaos resulted from such discordant promises. In June and July 1919, there were a total 528 peasant revolts against Soviet officials and that same July a rebel meeting resulted in Makhno's forces assassinating Hryhoriev and several of his aides. Meanwhile, the White Army would invade Ukraine periodically, murdering of their opponents. The Bolsheviks would frequently reconquer the land and murder so called "aristocrats" and members of the "bourgeoisie."²⁶

Ultimately though, it would be the murder of some 50,000 Jews between 1918 and 1920 that would have lasting political consequences for Ukraine. Soviet propagandists would falsely portray the moderate social democrat, Petliura, as the primary cause of violent antisemitism. In 1933, as the British Foreign Office described the role of Petliura in Ukraine during the Civil War of 1918-1921, it noted that during his tenure he sought to integrate West Ukraine, which was contested by Poland, into the republic he established after the fall of Skoropadsky. This in turn led to a brief war with Poland, which quickly fizzled out due to the February 1919 Bolshevik invasion, which prompted Petliura to form an alliance with Poland against the Bolsheviks. He ultimately failed to capture Kyiv, but the Poles were able to organize a fixed boundary with Russia in 1920 and 1921, at the Treaty of Riga.²⁷ Needless to say, the war yielded no success for Petliura and it was noted by the British Foreign Office in 1933 that his impact on Ukraine was minimal. Petliura himself refrained from anti-Semitic rhetoric and actions and tried to discourage it among his peers. He frequently pointed out that the Central Rada included Jews in its leadership and that his government granted Jewish autonomy, the formation of Jewish

²⁶ Ibid, 54-55.

²⁷ "Ukraine: Memorandum by Ponsonby Moore Crosthwaite on the History of Ukraine and Its Relations with Poland and Russia, 11 December 1933", Marco Carynnyk, Lubomyr Y Luciuk, and Bohdan S Kordan, *The Foreign Office and the famine: British documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-1933* (Kingston, Ont.; Vestal, NY: Limestone Press, 1988), 359.

political parties, and the creation of Yiddish publications. He once said to his own ranks during the violent pogroms, ““Because Christ commands it, we urge everyone to help the Jewish sufferers ...””²⁸ Most violence towards Jews from Ukrainians were caused by local gangs and warlords, who flourished in part due to Makhno’s anarchy, and who sought to take Jewish hostages in exchange for relatives captured by the Bolsheviks or other opposing armies.

Because the Soviets ultimately triumphed during the Civil War, they were able to portray the pogroms as intrinsic to Ukrainian nationalism. In addition to covering up Bolshevik pogroms, they fabricated a history in which the Central Rada never “represented a real national movement at all” and the various gang activities against Jews during the post-Revolution Civil War were the true face of Ukrainian nationalism organized by Petliura himself. Soviet officials went so far as to gather false testimonies of anti-Semitic violence against Petliura and publish it in several languages. Despite efforts by the Ukrainian community in Paris to discredit the allegations, Petliura’s image among Jews in Russia was tainted and he was ultimately assassinated by a Russian Jew, Sholom Schwartzband, in 1926.²⁹ This chaotic situation produced uncertainty but it was also an opportunity to create scapegoats. The Soviets, for example, projected the idea of antisemitism as applicable over the Ukrainian population as a whole. In truth, such allegations were deflections from Soviet brutality against various class, political, and ethnic opponents.

The Soviet Union’s violence against the Ukrainian national movement was a mainstay from its inception. The Soviet Union’s ideology of hatred towards peasant societies, as well as its residual Great Russian mentality, and anti-nationalist politics created an environment in

²⁸ Henry Abramson, *A Prayer for the Government: Ukrainians and Jews in Revolutionary Times, 1917-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 157; quoted in Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 60.

²⁹ Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 63.

which mass slaughter by forced famine in Ukraine became a distinct possibility. Yet a successful cover-up of such an event would have remained impossible if not for the compliance of Western reporters and media outlets who held similarly prejudiced views about peasants. They also valued modernization and industrialization over the rights of minority nationalities. The next section discusses the origins of the individual who epitomized such ideas: Walter Duranty.

III: Walter Duranty

Walter Duranty was born on May 25th 1884 in Liverpool, England. He was brought up in a middle-class family that possessed Victorian values. Characteristic of Victorian-era middle-class lifestyle were country fairs that would depict stereotyped versions of other nations in the form of plays and skits. In Duranty's own words, he noted that these skits portrayed Russia as a place "where savage animals could still menace man" and the people as willing "to sacrifice lives of others, however dear to them to save their own..."³⁰ Thus, Duranty's upbringing influenced his later contempt towards those he perceived as less intelligent or civilized than himself.

Duranty was academically successful despite being shuffled around various schools in his youth as a result of his parents' unstable marriage. He earned a spot in Classical Scholarship in Emmanuel College at Cambridge, and matriculated in October 1903. During his time there, Duranty developed an interest in fiction writing and scoffed at religious studies, despite Emmanuel's Puritan heritage.³¹ Duranty would later state that his defining college moment was when he earned a job "giving lessons in Latin and Greek to the son of a wealthy lace

³⁰ Walter Duranty, *I Write As I Please* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1935), 5; quoted in S. J. Taylor, *Stalin's Apologist: Walter Duranty: The New York Times's Man in Moscow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 17.

³¹ Taylor, *Stalin's Apologist*, 24.

manufacturer in Nottingham.” While there, he had heated arguments with his employer’s friend, who argued that his college background rendered him useless to society. Duranty felt compelled to refute him by betting that he could “double an investment of five pounds within twenty-four hours.”³² He did so with the help of a neighboring vendor who instructed him how to sell perfume quickly. He encouraged him to randomly squirt the perfume sample bottle at couples passing by, which Duranty found to be quite amusing. He reached a profit of 120 percent and won his bet. Duranty would later recall that these early experiences prompted him to approach life in terms of what would enhance his own self-interest at any given moment, even if it included undue embellishment.³³

Around this time, Duranty began writing articles under the supervision of Wythe Williams at the Paris division of the *New York Times*. Duranty offered Williams a glimpse of the Parisian bohemian scene of artists, writers, sculptors, as well as the scandalous customs of the Paris stage which infamously included a nude scene of party-goers during a revival of Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, produced by Firman Gemier.³⁴ When World War I began, Duranty had no other professional experience reporting; he had mainly reported on decadent events involving sex and frivolity that were often dramatized for audience appeal. He applied this casual and detached attitude towards rumors of atrocities committed by the Germans, which he insisted were true even when evidence was lacking. For example, in January 1916, during a Zeppelin raid over Paris, he paid inordinate attention to the detail of the deaths resulting from the raid:

From the whole quarter arose a murmur like the buzz of a huge and angry hive of bees. As I stumbled through the darkness – the taxi was not allowed to pass – I heard constantly one word, “reprisals” ... the firemen and police were busy amid the ruin, and

³² Ibid, 25.

³³ Ibid, 26.

³⁴ Ibid, 37.

bodies awaiting removal to the Morgue were lying on heaps of rubbish in the narrow courtyards ... The worst case of all was a five-storey tenement at the end of a cul-de-sac.... Here the family of zouave, Auguste Petitjean, were celebrating the father's leave from the front. His wife and 15-year-old daughter, Lucie, his old father-in-law ... and his sister ... with her two little boys ... had gathered around a table to hear stories of the war. Suddenly the war struck them. All seven were killed instantly. When I left there four bodies already had been recovered.³⁵

Duranty enjoyed capturing current events through poetic metaphors and the mechanics dramatized storytelling. The notion of a “good story,” rather than a factual recounting of events became a recurring theme in Duranty's reports. In 1917, for example, he complied with a request to create a false story in the interest of the Allied war effort. The story was an “eyewitness” account of an Allied naval victory over a German submarine attack.³⁶ This early sketch of Duranty's professional early years puts into context his journalistic involvement with Ukraine and the famine. Duranty displayed a willingness to falsify information for his own amusement or advancement.

IV: Elitism, NEP, and Misinformation

The Red Army declared “peace” in Ukraine in 1921. This idea of peace consisted of the full scale implementation of Bolshevism, which included the “abolition of trade, the nationalization of industry, the failed experiments with collectivization and the use of forced labor” as well as the promotion of a militarized economy.³⁷ As a result, Lenin's policy of total grain requisition resulted in a massive famine across the entire Soviet Union. One major difference between the 1921 famine and the *Holodomor*, however, was that no attempts were made to cover up the former. Instead, the Bolsheviks appealed for help abroad, which resulted in

³⁵ Walter Duranty, “New Zeppelin Raid on Paris Fails; 24 Dead, 30 Injured in Saturday's Raid; Majority Are Women and Children,” *New York Times*, 31 Jan. 1916, pp. 1-2, quoted in Taylor, *Stalin's Apologist*, 47.

³⁶ Taylor, *Stalin's Apologist*, 48.

³⁷ Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 68-69.

food and financial aid from the International Red Cross, the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), and the American Relief Administration (ARA).³⁸

Just as they sought aid abroad, however, the Bolsheviks were perfectly willing to use the famine to further their economic goals and eliminate rebellious groups and so called anti-party elements. Stolen precious metals and jewels were sold overseas in exchange for industrial machinery. Confiscated grain was exported “in order to ‘secure machinery and materials for the economic improvement of the survivors.’”³⁹ A “famine committee” was set up to ensure that surplus grain be distributed to hungry provinces in Russia at the expense of southern and eastern Ukraine. In Ukrainian villages suspected of being unable to meet their grain quotas, Lenin ordered his requisition units to take fifteen to twenty hostages and threaten them with execution if not enough grain was procured. The American Relief Administration noticed the harsh treatment the Bolsheviks inflicted upon Ukrainians, but it was prevented from engaging in famine relief work in the region. Initially, the reasoning was that Ukraine did not need food aid. Then, the reasoning went, that this was not possible because Ukraine’s was a “sovereign state”. Eventually, the starvation was so severe that the Bolsheviks in Ukraine could no longer refuse entry to relief workers.⁴⁰ The acknowledgement of Ukraine’s sovereignty, while the famine was occurring, serves as an illustration of the perceived threat that the Ukrainian nation posed to Bolshevism.

Duranty’s coverage of the famine was poor. His initial attempt to be the *New York Times* correspondent in Russia was rebuffed. Throughout 1918-1919, Western powers provided aid to counter-revolutionary groups, and *The New York Times* lauded the defeat of Lenin in the Baltic

³⁸ Ibid, 74.

³⁹ H.H. Fisher, *The Famine in Soviet Russia, 1919-1923: The Operations of the American Relief Administration* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), 535; quoted in Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 75.

⁴⁰ Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 76-77.

region.⁴¹ During this time, Duranty was eager to travel to the Baltics, but sought to avoid travel with government officials. He feigned having the Spanish Flu and instead created his own itinerary, travelling from city to city and writing about “practically everything he encountered”, from small-time smuggling operations and hostage exchanges to grand political conspiracies.⁴² While Duranty was in Latvia, local authorities informed him that the Bolsheviks planned to overthrow the Latvian government and conduct espionage in the United States. In his only *Times* story that would ever receive a bonus, Duranty wrote:

A great Bolshevik conspiracy has just been discovered here, and the leaders with the principal subordinates have been arrested to the number of 100. The object was to overthrow the Government and establish Bolshevik rule.

Last, but not least, a Russian sailor was taken bearing large sums of money and jewels of great value concealed in the soles of his boots and a letter from one of Lenin’s closest satellites to “comrades” in America. ... It is said to contain minute directions for the conduct of the Bolshevik campaign in America, for the organization of various centres, and the methods to be followed subsequently.⁴³

In fact, Duranty misrepresented the role of the Russian sailor, keen to exaggerate events in order to create public agitation and frame news items as a form of entertainment. The sailor was approached to deliver the pro-Bolshevik paraphernalia to a specific location in exchange for a payment of his travels. The story grabbed the attention of American readers, however, because it came at the time of “the Red Scare”, a period when many Americans thought that an anarchist or communist revolution might be imminent. Duranty understood that such a story would confirm fears that labor union strikes were indications of Bolshevik incursion into America.⁴⁴ As it became more apparent that the Bolsheviks would win the Russian Civil War, the Red Scare

⁴¹ Taylor, *Stalin’s Apologist*, 83-84.

⁴² *Ibid*, 85-87.

⁴³ Walter Duranty, Copyright, 1919, by The New York Times Company Special Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES. "Seize Red Courier On His Way Here: Had Mail, Jewels, And Large Sums Of Money In Soles Of His Boots." *New York Times (1857-1922)*, Dec 25, 1919. <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.wexler.hunter.cuny.edu/docview/100366094?accountid=27495>. (Accessed October 29th, 2019).

⁴⁴ Taylor, *Stalin’s Apologist*, 90-91.

faced significant backlash from American liberals. The *Times* tacitly admitted a need to reassess its biases against the Soviet Union. After Duranty conducted a cordial interview with Maksim Litvinov, who would become the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union during the *Holodomor*, he concluded that negotiations in Riga affirming the independence of the Baltic state were going to be a lasting success. He also concluded that Lenin's turn towards the New Economic Policy (NEP) was an indication that "“Lenin has thrown communism overboard.””⁴⁵

Despite the laudatory tone Duranty had adopted towards the Bolsheviks in his reporting, he faced immediate travel restrictions upon his arrival in Moscow in August, 1921. *The New York Times* decided that Duranty would not be appointed as "its regular Moscow correspondent until his position there was secure," which hampered his ability to produce eyewitness reports on the Russian famine as it was unfolding.⁴⁶ Instead, the *Times* relied upon Floyd Gibbons of the *Chicago Tribune*, who described an apocalyptic scenario of nearly 15 million people perishing from starvation. Gibbons believed that conditions were so dire that least one million peasants would have perished regardless of how much relief was provided. His reporting revealed great sympathy for the peasantry.⁴⁷

Duranty did not share the same sympathy for the starving peasantry, however. When he spoke to Russian officials in Samara, he fixated on their belief that the American relief effort would not mitigate famine conditions because "God had turned his face away from Russia."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Walter Duranty, Copyright, 1921, by The New York Times Company Special Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES. "Lenin Abandons State Ownership As Soviet Policy: Official Decree Retains Control Of Only A Few Of The Big National Industries." *New York Times*, (1857-1922), Aug 13, 1921. <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.wexler.hunter.cuny.edu/docview/98396530?accountid=27495>. (Accessed October 29th, 2019).

⁴⁶ James William Crowl, *Angel's in Stalin's Paradise: Western Reporters in Soviet Russia, 1917 to 1937, A Case Study of Louis Fischer and Walter Duranty* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982), 28.

⁴⁷ Taylor, *Stalin's Apologist*, 101-103.

⁴⁸ Crowl, *Angels in Stalin's Paradise*, 29.

Duranty was also quick to accept the description of the famine in restricted areas by *Pravda*, the official newspaper of the Soviet Communist Party, which argued that peasants were exaggerating the severity of the famine. Duranty remarked that ““reading between the lines of this story, I came to a conclusion which I have never had occasion to modify, to wit that the Russians are a romantic folk whose innate sense of drama is stronger than their regard for truth.” He added that not many foreigners “understand this quirk of the Russian character, which perhaps accounts for the fact that so many of them talk and write such preposterous nonsense about Russia.”⁴⁹ This passage shows that even if Duranty had had the ability to witness local conditions first-hand, his stereotyped views of “the Russian character” might have shaped his reporting.

Duranty continued to praise Lenin for his shift towards the NEP, which introduced some market-based reforms into the economy. During a brief vacation in Riga in October, 1921, Duranty argued that “people generally were better off than before the Revolution” and made an unsubstantiated claim that “most ‘found their present life for all its discomforts more interesting than the old.’”⁵⁰ His coverage of the Soviet Union during the NEP continued to indicate an elitist attitude towards Russians. An example was the convening of the *Congress of Soviets* in December, 1921. Duranty ridiculed the delegates as “simple minded” and compared the execution of the conventions to New York politics during the era of Tammany Hall. This was justified, Duranty argued because “the electorate lacked the education and political sophistication necessary for real democracy.”⁵¹ *The New York Times* editorial section did not challenge Duranty’s praise for how the Soviet system evolved during the NEP, but instead clarifying that

⁴⁹ Duranty, *I Write as I Please*, 125-126, quoted in Crowl; *Angels in Stalin’s Paradise*, 29.

⁵⁰ Duranty, “Russian’s New Life as Lived in Moscow,” *New York Times* 14 Sep 1921, p. 21; quoted in Crowl, *Angels in Stalin’s Paradise*, 31.

⁵¹ Crowl, *Angels in Stalin’s Paradise*, 32.

Duranty was in no way “converted to Bolshevism”, but accurately portrayed how the Soviet government exercised its power in Moscow.⁵²

In 1922, other journalists and diplomats suspected that Duranty might be compromised. Beyond his enjoyment of the decadent lifestyle of Soviet elite, which NEP policies had encouraged, he had moved into an apartment provided to him rent-free by the government for three years in exchange for repairs to the room. Duranty’s apartment became a hosting place for a variety of famous intellectuals eager to learn more about the Soviet Union such as “Sinclair Lewis and George Bernard Shaw.”⁵³ His renovations included an open English fireplace, a luxury at the time, and he opened his apartment to visitors from the entire political spectrum. He was interested in talking to those who had escaped from the United States as a result of the Red Scare. Many of them were disillusioned with the Soviet regime because of its ideological extremism, which consisted of endless debate over theoretical principles. They were also disillusioned by the apparent luxurious lifestyle of top ranking party members, which they blamed for corruption.⁵⁴ The other major development that aroused suspicion was his being the first foreign correspondent “to bring an automobile to the city,” which would have not aroused suspicion if he had not upgraded from a Model T to a Buick with a horn nearly identical to the automobiles of the Soviet secret police. Duranty also appeared to enjoy blaring his horn during police raids which only added to the terrifying atmosphere of Soviet Moscow.⁵⁵

Many of Duranty’s colleagues during the Cold War suspected in hindsight that a “special deal” was arranged between him and the Soviet government. Some, such as William Henry Chamberlin who reported on the *Holodomor*, believed the cancellation of Duranty’s probation

⁵² Ibid, 33.

⁵³ Ibid, 34.

⁵⁴ Taylor, *Stalin’s Apologist*, 119-120.

⁵⁵ Crowl, *Angels in Stalin’s Paradise*, 34-35.

coincided with an agreement to write about Bolshevism favorably. Others, such as Eugene Lyons, argued that the Soviets had provided the apartment and the automobile based on a conversation with Ivy Litvinov, wife of Maksim Litvinov who “told him ‘that she once walked in on a scene at the Paris Embassy when Duranty was receiving some cash.’”⁵⁶ It is hard to evaluate such speculations and rumors. They are documented in interviews long after Duranty had passed away in 1957. Still, given Duranty’s past tendencies, outlined above, it is not unreasonable to believe that his attitude was shaped by a desire to preserve his lifestyle.

V: The Foreign Press and the Cover-up of the Holodomor

Duranty was one example of a reporter coming close to the Bolsheviks and witnessing Soviet policies. Another was Gareth Jones. Since their stories vis-à-vis the famine were intertwined, it is important to consider them together.

In March 1933, Gareth Jones, a twenty-seven year old Welshman with working knowledge of German, French, and Russian, made a fateful decision to disembark from his train traveling to Kharkiv, Ukraine, forty miles north of the city.⁵⁷ This enabled Jones to record in detail the *Holodomor* as it was unfolding without any official Soviet supervision. Even though the notebook of Gareth Jones clearly outlines Soviet culpability and deliberation in executing the famine, the effect of his exposure was of no major consequence at the time because, as the author Teresa Cherfas has put it, “when he spoke out, he was dumped on by the very journalists whose profession he exemplified, abandoned by his patrons, and forgotten.”⁵⁸

Jones’s brilliance was demonstrated as early as 1930, when he wrote a piece called “The Victim of 1930,” capturing the effects of the Great Depression. To do so, Jones created a

⁵⁶ Letter of June 20, 1977, Eugene Lyons to the author; quoted in Crowl, *Angel’s in Stalin’s Paradise*, 35.

⁵⁷ Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 372-373.

⁵⁸ Teresa Cherfas, “Reporting Stalin’s Famine: Jones and Muggeridge, A Case Study in Forgetting and Rediscovery,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 14, 4 (Fall 2013), 776.

prototype of a despondent individual whose “face reflects a medley of feelings – emptiness, boredom, fear, disgust, and, above all disillusion. He has no name for he exists in nearly all countries. He is the victim of 1930; the Unemployed.”⁵⁹ He went on to ask “What effect has this had on the affairs of the world?” The answer was the Depression had “made 1930 a year of fear, hatred, depression, and despair in the dealings of nations with one another as well as in industry.”⁶⁰

Jones was also knowledgeable of the failure of Stalin’s Five-Year Plan,⁶¹ which was implemented after the end of the NEP in 1928. In October 1932, Jones reported a young Bolshevik stating that “villages will be turned into collective farms where land and the cows and the horses and the pigs will be owned in common and the land ploughed in by common tractors. Private property is a curse and we will abolish it in the villages. Our new methods are increasing harvests and are producing a happy and healthy countryside.”⁶² In the same article, however, Jones also reported on a peasant who presented a picture of the Soviet Union antithetical to that of the Bolshevik official. In contrasting the era of NEP with the Five-Year Plan, the peasant explained that “1926 and 1927 were fine years when we still had our land. But it will be better to be under the earth than to live now. Land, cow, and bread they’ve taken away from us. Nearly all our grain-and it was little enough-has been carted away and sent to the towns and we’re afraid to speak.”⁶³ The report is an illustration of Jones’ interest in capturing not only the

⁵⁹ Gareth Jones, “The Victim of 1930,” *The Western Mail*, 31 December 1930, https://garethjones.org/soviet_articles/victim_of_1930.htm. (Accessed March 20th, 2019).

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ The Five-Year Plan was a centralized system of economic production that relied on quota targets for various industries. Fulfillment of the plan was considered to be top priority regardless of its viability.

⁶² Jones, “Will There be Soup? Russia Dreads the Coming Winter,” *The Western Mail*, Cardiff, 15 October 1932. <https://www.garethjones.org/overview/article32-1.htm>. (Accessed March 20th, 2019).

⁶³ Ibid.

mindset of party members, but also a commitment to obtain firsthand knowledge of peasants' negative reactions to collectivization.

During his unsupervised journey in March 1933, Jones kept a diary. In it, he recorded that the “suburbs of Moscow are in a disgraceful condition. The wonderful houses so much admired 2 or 3 years ago now look shabby and look broken down.” The diary entry continues with a dialogue between Jones and a couple of peasants, which is worth quoting at length to illustrate Jones' journalistic approach:

Stopped to talk to a peasant. “Terrible. We have no bread. We have to go all the way to Moscow to get bread and then they give us two kilos and we have to pay 3 rubles a kilo. How can a poor man do that?”

... I joined the Kolhkoz 3 weeks ago ... They made us pay so many taxes that life became a burden.

... Woman came out and started crying. “They're killing us. In my village there used to be 300 cows and now we only have 30. The horses have died. How can I feed us all?”

Man: “I have a family of 10 people. How can they live?”

Woman: “And the kulaks. Look at what they call kulaks. Just ordinary peasants who have a cow or two. They're murdering peasants, sending them away. Oppression – oppression – oppression!”

... People I spoke to repeated this ... all along the way.⁶⁴

At the same time, Jones was committed to reporting on the hardships of the Five-Year Plan. On March 31st, 1933, for example, he published an article emphasizing how the famine was destroying families. Jones described a “father and a son, the father, a Russian skilled worker in a Moscow factory and the son a member of the Young communist league” arguing with one another with the father shouting “It is terrible now. We workers are starving. Look at Chelyabinsk where I once worked. Disease there is carrying away numbers of us workers and

⁶⁴ Famine Exposure, Transcript of Gareth Jones Diary Notes relating to the Soviet Ukraine Famine 1932-1933, 21 March 1933, <https://www.garethjones.org/overview/1933diary.htm>. (Accessed March 20th, 2019).

the little food there is uneatable ...” The son, in turn, replied: “But look at the giants of industry which we have built. Look at the new tractor works. Look at the Dniepostroy. That construction has been worth suffering for.” Jones then highlighted the father’s rebuttal: “What’s the use of construction when you have destroyed all that’s best in Russia?” To this point, Jones suggested that this idea reflected the opinion of 96 percent of the Soviet Union’s inhabitants.⁶⁵ He continued to describe how “within a few miles of Moscow” bread was gone, cattle were dead, and horses were no longer available for plowing. Jones then emphasized that the peasantry deemed the starvation to be worse than the 1921 famine because “there was famine in several great regions but in most parts the peasants could live. It was a localised famine ... But today the famine is everywhere, in the formerly rich Ukraine, in Russia, in Central Asia, in North Caucasia – everywhere.”⁶⁶ The most important detail in Jones’ report was that “millions are dying in the villages” and that he “did not visit a single village where many had not died ...”⁶⁷

It was at this critical juncture that Duranty took it upon himself to frame Jones’ reports as hyperbolic. In his infamous article “Russians Hungry, But Not Starving” Duranty described Jones’ reports as a “big scare story.” The story was faulty, he argued, because it covered “a rather inadequate cross-section of a big country.” Duranty then alleged that Jones “told me there was virtually no bread in the villages he had visited and that the adults were haggard, gaunt and discouraged, but that he had not seen no dead or dying animals or human beings.”⁶⁸ He concluded the article by justifying the Soviet program:

... you can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs, and the Bolshevik leaders are just as indifferent to the casualties that may be involved in their drive toward socialization as

⁶⁵ Gareth Jones, “Famine Rules Russia: The 5-year Plan Has Killed the Bread Supply. PROGRESS AT THE EXPENSE OF HAPPINESS,” *The London Evening Standard*, 31 March 1933, <https://www.garethjones.org/overview/article33-12.htm>. (Accessed March 20th, 2019).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Walter Duranty, “RUSSIANS HUNGRY, BUT NOT STARVING,” *The New York Times*, 31 March 1933, https://garethjones.org/soviet_articles/russians_hungry_not_starving.htm. (Accessed March 20th, 2019).

any general during the World War ... There is no actual starvation or deaths from starvation, but there is widespread mortality from diseases due to malnutrition.⁶⁹

Duranty's report amounted to a false narrative of his interactions with Jones and a brazen lie about famine conditions in the Soviet Union.

If eyewitness evidence from a well-educated, Russian-speaking reporter demonstrated that the Soviet regime did engineer a famine, why was Duranty's take more influential in the West? One reason is that acceptance of Duranty's analysis was rooted in the effects of the Great Depression, which Stalin interpreted as a sign of the end of capitalism. Author S. J. Taylor identifies a popular chant during this era, which extolled Stalin even more so than Lenin:

Capitalism's falling down,
falling down,
falling down,
Capitalism's falling down,
so said Lenin.
Communism's going up,
going up,
going up,
Communism's going up,
so said Stalin.⁷⁰

To some degree, Stalin's attitude towards the fate of capitalist societies also mirrored the mood among some Western intellectuals at this time. In "1929 only 2,500 Americans had shown enough interest in the Soviet experiment to visit the country, but by 1930 the number had doubled, and by 1931 as many as 10,000 had made the pilgrimage to witness the energetic building of a nation by an enthusiastic army of workers."⁷¹

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ James Abbe, *I Photograph Russia* (New York: Robert McBride, 1934), 271; quoted in Taylor, *Stalin's Apologist*, 156.

⁷¹ Taylor, *Stalin's Apologist*, 156.

Duranty seized upon this mentality and moment, presenting “Stalinism” as something distinct from communism, in the process seeking to make the Soviet regime more palatable to Western skeptics. He framed it, instead, as a form of state capitalism. In “Red Russia of Today Ruled by Stalinism, not by Communism,” for example, Duranty argued that “Russia today cannot be judged by Western standards or interpreted in Western terms ... the dominant principle of the Soviet Union, though called Marxism or Communism, is now a very different thing from the theoretical conception advanced by Karl Marx.”⁷² Additionally, Duranty adopted a racial outlook when discussing Stalin’s brutality, explaining that because Russia’s “racial needs and characteristics, which are strange and peculiar, and fundamentally more Asiatic than European,” it could be argued that the “Czarist regime was poisoned by the European veneer that was spread over Russia – a veneer that foreign and at bottom unwelcome to the mass of the Russian people ...” Thus, the argument went, Stalin had “re-established the semi-divine, supreme autocracy of the imperial idea” compatible with the nature of the Russian people but “something for the Russians to measure at, not for the rest of the world to measure Russians by.”⁷³ Instead of viewing Stalin’s Five-Year Plan critically for what it was doing to Soviet inhabitants, Duranty suggested that Stalin be understood for creating a scheme of industrialization suited for the Russian people, whom he viewed as racially defined by their limitations.

Duranty’s biased justification of the Five-Year Plan earned him the Pulitzer Prize for foreign reporting in 1932. As the Pulitzer committee put it at the time:

Mr. Duranty’s dispatches show profundity and intimate comprehension of conditions in Russia and of the causes of those conditions. They are marked by scholarship, profundity,

⁷² Walter Duranty, Special Cable to *The New York Times*, by Walter Duranty, “RED RUSSIA OF TODAY RULED BY STALINISM, NOT BY COMMUNISM,” *New York Times*, 14 Jun 1931:1, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.wexler.hunter.cuny.edu/docview/99084927?accountid=27495>. (Accessed October 29th, 2019).

⁷³ *Ibid.*

impartiality, sound judgment and exceptional clarity and are excellent examples of the best type of foreign correspondence.”⁷⁴

Duranty’s competitive advantage in earning the Pulitzer Prize was also augmented by the fact “that *The New York Times* had ‘its representatives on the Pulitzer committees ...’⁷⁵ Additional factors may have included Duranty’s close relationship with Herbert Pulitzer, “the youngest of Joseph Pulitzer’s three sons” who shared an apartment with Duranty in the early 1920s.⁷⁶ None of these factors can be said to have definitely earned Duranty’s Pulitzer Prize in foreign reporting. Still, the episode illustrates how Duranty garnered both prestige and influence, both within the British and the American media, as well as more broadly in political circles.

Unlike Duranty, Jones did not have this kind of prestige and media power. Nevertheless, he dutifully exposed more details about the nature of the famine, rebuking Duranty for his effective collaboration with the Soviet regime. On April 5th, 1933, for example, he warned that the O.G.P.U.⁷⁷ was falsely alleging through propaganda posters that “England and America are preparing war on the Soviet Union. The Pope and the Hitlerites are allies in preparing to attack the Soviet Union.”⁷⁸ A few days later, Jones reported that famine conditions were especially severe in Ukraine where people were “existing for a week or more on salt and water” and that such conditions were inexcusable because “climactic conditions have in the past few years, blessed the Soviet Government.” He stated that the reason for the famine was that “land has been taken away from 70 per cent of the peasantry,” “cattle were seized and put into vast State cattle factories,” and “six or seven millions of the best farmers (i.e., the Kulaks) ... have been

⁷⁴ Report of the Correspondence Jury, March 11, 1932, Allen S. Will, chairman. Files of the Advisory Board on the Pulitzer Prizes, Columbia University School of Journalism; quoted in Crowl, *Angels in Stalin’s Paradise*, 143.

⁷⁵ Crowl, *Angels in Stalin’s Paradise*, 144.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 146.

⁷⁷ Soviet Secret Police Force 1922-1934.

⁷⁸ Gareth Jones, “O.G.P.U.’s Blow to Trade,” *The Western Mail*, 5 April 1933, <https://garethjones.org/overview/article33-4.htm>. (Accessed March 20th, 2019).

uprooted and been exiled with a barbarity which is not realised in Britain.”⁷⁹ Finally, on May 13th, 1933 Jones took Duranty to task for the misrepresentations in the latter’s reporting:

Walter Duranty, whom I must thank for his continued kindness and helpfulness to hundreds of American and British visitors to Moscow, immediately cabled a denial of the famine. He suggested that my judgment was only based on a forty-mile tramp through villages. He stated that he had inquired in Soviet commissariats and in the foreign embassies and had come to the conclusion that there was no famine, but that there was a “serious food shortage throughout the country ... No actual starvation or deaths from starvation, but there is widespread mortality from diseases due to malnutrition.”

Evidence From Several Sources

While partially agreeing with my statement, he implied that my report was a “scare story” and compared it with certain fantastic prophecies of Soviet downfall. He also made the strange suggestion that I was forecasting the doom of the Soviet régime, a forecast I have never ventured.

I stand by my statement that Soviet Russia is suffering from a severe famine. It would be foolish to draw this conclusion from my tramp through a small part of vast Russia, although I must remind Mr. Duranty that it was my third visit to Russia, that I devoted four years of university life to the study of the Russian language and history and that on this occasion alone I visited in all twenty villages, not only in the Ukraine, but also in the black earth district, and in the Moscow region, and that I slept in peasants’ cottages, and did not immediately leave for the next village.

My first evidence was gathered from foreign observers. Since Mr. Duranty introduces consuls into the discussion, a thing I am loath to do, for they are official representatives of their countries and should not be quoted, may I say that I discussed the Russian situation with between twenty and thirty consuls and diplomatic representatives of various nations and that their evidence supported my point of view. But they are not allowed to express their views in the press, and therefore remain silent.

Journalists Are Handicapped.

Journalists, on the other hand, are allowed to write, but the censorship has turned them into masters of euphemism and understatement. Hence they give “famine” the polite name of “food shortage” and “starving to death” is softened down to read as “widespread mortality from diseases due to malnutrition.” Consuls are not so reticent in private conversation.

My second evidence was based on conversations with peasants who had migrated into the towns from various parts of Russia. Peasants from the richest parts of Russia coming into the towns for bread. Their story of the deaths in their villages from starvation and of the

⁷⁹ Gareth Jones, “SEIZURE OF LAND AND SLAUGHTER OF STOCK,” *The Western Mail*, April 8th, 1933, <https://www.garethjones.org/overview/article33-7.htm>. (Accessed March 20th, 2019).

death of the greater part of their cattle and horses was tragic, and each conversation corroborated the previous one.

Third, my evidence was based upon letters written by German colonists in Russia, appealing for help to their compatriots in Germany. “My brother’s four children have died of hunger.” “We have had no bread for six months.” “If we do not get help from abroad, there is nothing left but to die of hunger.” Those are typical passages from these letters.

Statements by Peasants.

Fourth, I gathered evidence from journalists and technical experts who had been in the countryside. In *The Manchester Guardian*, which has been exceedingly sympathetic toward the Soviet régime, there appeared on March 25, 27 and 28 an excellent series of articles on “The Soviet and the Peasantry” (which had not been submitted to the censor). The correspondent, who had visited North Caucasus and the Ukraine, states: “To say that there is famine in some of the’ most fertile parts of Russia is to say much less than the truth: there is not only famine, but - in the case of the North Caucasus at least - a state of war, a military occupation.” Of the Ukraine, he writes: “The population is starving.”

My final evidence is based on my talks with hundreds of peasants. They were not the “kulaks”- those mythical scapegoats for the hunger in Russia-but ordinary peasants. I talked with them alone in Russian and jotted down their conversations, which are an unanswerable indictment of Soviet agricultural policy. The peasants said emphatically that the famine was worse than in 1921 and that fellow-villagers had died or were dying. Mr. Duranty says that I saw in the villages no dead human beings nor animals. That is true, but one does not need a particularly nimble brain to grasp that even in the Russian famine districts the dead are buried and that there the dead animals are devoured. May I in conclusion congratulate the Soviet Foreign Office on its skill in concealing the true situation in the U.S.S.R.? Moscow is not Russia, and the sight of well fed people there tends to hide the real Russia.⁸⁰

This important passage highlighted not only the censorship of journalists by the Soviet Foreign Office, but it also implied how such censorship could go hand-in-hand with an incomplete picture from the capital. Unlike Duranty, Jones took the initiative to describe the famine *from the point of view of the peasantry*, including instances of deaths, starvation, and local oppression as it was unfolding. He gathered reports by “journalists and technical experts who had been in the countryside.”

⁸⁰ Gareth Jones, “Mr. Jones Replies: Former Secretary of Lloyd George Tells of Observations in Russia,” *New York Times*, 13 May 1933, https://www.garethjones.org/soviet_articles/jones_replies.htm. (Accessed November 3rd, 2019).

Jones's reputation may have been salvaged had it not been for the ambiguous actions of fellow journalist Malcolm Muggeridge. At first Muggeridge agreed with Jones, even indicated in a private letter that "the Liberal mind has now lost what qualities it once had – that is, a certain superficial integrity, and a capacity in the last resort, to abandon its own pre-conceptions in the face of plain facts."⁸¹ In the letter he also indicated that he wrote to *Manchester Guardian* in regard to the Metro-Vickers affair, that "You don't want to know what is going on in Russia, and you don't want your readers to know either; if the Metrovick people had been Jews or Negroes, your righteous indignation would have been unbounded. You'd have published photographs of their lacerated backsides."⁸² Jones responded to this outreach favorably, and wrote to the *Manchester Guardian* that Muggeridge correctly described the famine in Ukraine and the North Caucasus and despite the *Manchester Guardian*'s attempt to "discredit the views" of Muggeridge, he was "the first journalist to have informed Britain of the true situation of Russian agriculture" and "one has only to speak to hundreds of peasant-beggars, who have been driven by hunger from many parts of Russia into the towns, to find confirmation of your correspondent's statements."⁸³

Ultimately, however, Muggeridge failed to reciprocate Jones's rebuke of the *Manchester Guardian* and waited four months before addressing the relationship between Duranty and Soviet officials. In his letter to Jones, in an attempt to justify his four month-long silence, he suggested that "If I could get a hold of specimens of his messages during, say, the last year, I believe I could write an amusing article on Durranty as a foreign correspondent that a paper like TRUTH

⁸¹ Malcolm Muggeridge, Letters to Gareth from Muggeridge – April & September 1933, <https://www.garethjones.org/overview/muggeridge3.htm>. (Accessed March 20th, 2019).

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Gareth Jones, "The Peasants in Russia: Exhausted Supplies," *The Manchester Guardian*, 8 May 1933, <https://www.garethjones.org/overview/muggeridge2.htm>. (Accessed March 20th, 2019).

might publish, and that might do some good...” He then asked Jones “Do you happen to have, or know how I might get hold of, such specimens of this messages [?].”⁸⁴ The content of the letter indicates that Muggeridge valued self-interest and promotion over truthfully reporting the facts.

Jones was effectively silenced and major newspaper organizations such as the *New York Times* and *Manchester Guardian* became complicit in the silencing of voices exposing the famine. This meant that Duranty had free reign and an important platform. He became the defining factor in enabling the normalization of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. The 1932 Democratic Party presidential candidate, Franklin D. Roosevelt was fascinated by Duranty’s reports regarding the Five-Year Plan. Applebaum notes that shortly after Duranty’s Pulitzer Prize win, he was invited “to the governor’s [Roosevelt] mansion in Albany, where the Democratic presidential candidate peppered him with queries.”⁸⁵

Throughout 1933, Duranty would continue to emphasize that Ukraine did not suffer from famine and that reports of famine were symptoms of the Russian mind being “simple-minded and superstitious.” He argued that “word of famine could cause hysteria among the peasants” and “even though they were not suffering themselves, peasants would tell about villages nearby where there was a terrible loss of life.”⁸⁶ Duranty’s framing continued to resonate with the political and economic aspirations of the Roosevelt administration, which by late 1933 believed that the threats of Germany and Japan warranted establishing relations with the Soviet Union. Applebaum also states that Roosevelt’s interest in Duranty’s reporting caused him to believe “that there might be a lucrative commercial relationship too. Eventually a deal was struck.

⁸⁴ Malcolm Muggeridge, Letters to Gareth from Muggeridge – April & September 1933, <https://www.garethjones.org/overview/muggeridge3.htm>. (Accessed March 20th, 2019).

⁸⁵ Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 371.

⁸⁶ Crowl, *Angels in Stalin’s Paradise*, 163.

Litvinov arrived in New York to sign it – accompanied by Duranty. During a lavish banquet for the Soviet Foreign Minister at the Waldorf Astoria, Duranty was introduced to the 1,500 guests. He stood up and bowed.”⁸⁷ With that, the Roosevelt administration effectively collaborated with Duranty in the cover-up of the *Holodomor*.

VI: The British Foreign Office, Diplomacy, and the Famine

But while media outlets contributed to the cover-up of the *Holodomor*, the presidential politics discussed above also remind us that it took diplomatic involvement to underplay the story of the famine. Looking at the British diplomatic response, along with the American one, highlights how this process was a transnational affair. Parallel with the story outlined above, this section analyzes British diplomatic communications about the *Holodomor* to show how normal relations with the Soviet Union became preferable over the alternative—open recognition or aid to the victims of the famine.

Early reports of grain collections were compiled in 1932 by the diplomat William Strang, who transmitted notes by Andrew Cairns, a wheat expert, “on behalf of the Empire Marketing Board.” In May 1932, the Ukrainian peasantry had already been stripped of grain “for the needs of the towns, or for the war reserve, or for export, or for seed purposes in other areas ...”⁸⁸ Such draconian policies were intensified in August 1932, when the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People’s Commissars of the U.S.S.R enacted several decrees against the pilferage of state property. Strang noted that “goods in transit, and the property of cooperatives and collective farms, including crops in the fields, are to be treated as State property and the maximum penalty which may be inflicted in the case of pilferage is the supreme measure of

⁸⁷ Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 381.

⁸⁸ “*Conditions in the Soviet Union*: William Strang (Moscow) to Sir John Simon, 4 May 1932, and Andrew Cairns to William Strang, 3 May 1932,” Carynnyk, Luciuk, and Kordan, *The Foreign Office and the famine: British documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-1933*, 5.

social protection, namely death.”⁸⁹ In addition to these penalties, the pilferage activities, which amounted to more than 40,000 incidents during the first quarter of 1932 were alleged to be caused by “kulaks” and bands of “horse thieves”, who were part of a class conspiracy against the Soviet Union. Complicating matters were reports that workers were also pilfering grain as well as peasants trapped on collective farms. These two classes could not be grouped with either kulaks or horse thieves. Strang promptly sent this dispatch to “the Department of Overseas Trade.”⁹⁰

On August 3rd, 1932 Cairns revealed in a letter to E.M.H. Lloyd details about his trip in Ukraine, Crimea, and the Northern Caucasus. In great detail he reported that on June 16th, 1932 at a bazaar near the Ukrainian border there “was practically no bread for sale and small buns of very coarse bread ... being sold for one rouble each, and small chickens at fifteen roubles each.” He proceeded to note that every station on his travels to Kyiv “had its crowd from scores to several hundred, depending on the size of the town – of rag-clad hungry peasants, some begging for bread, many waiting, mostly in vain, for tickets ... and not a trace of a smile anywhere.”⁹¹ When he arrived in Kyiv, a solitary woman informed him that villagers on the collective farms were dying and no family could afford the very little food being sold in the market. She claimed that food was being exported to Great Britain and Italy.⁹² The state of churches was dire as well, as they were either being converted into prisons and workers clubs, or being reduced into compounds of “many old priests begging, and groups of women and children in rags and filth,

⁸⁹ “*Protection of Property of State Undertakings, Collective Farms and Co-operatives*: William Strong (Moscow) to Sir John Simon, 10 August 1932,” Carynnyk, Luciuk, and Kordan, *The Foreign Office and the famine: British documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-1933*, 102.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 102-103.

⁹¹ “*Mr. Cairns’ Investigations in Soviet Union*: William Strang (Moscow) to Sir John Simon, 12 August 1932, and Andrew Cairns to E.M.H. Lloyd, 3 August 1932,” Carynnyk, Luciuk, and Kordan, *The Foreign Office and the famine: British documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-1933*, 105.

⁹² *Ibid*, 106.

taking turns at killing the lice in each others hair before retiring for the night on the damp grass.”⁹³ Complicating matters was an exodus of the peasantry into Kyiv causing the city to increase “from 400 to 600 thousand in 2 years, and the number of workers by 110 thousand.”⁹⁴

On June 21st, Cairns visited the October Revolution Commune near the borders of Poland and Romania. He noted the omnipresence of the military along the roads as well as in the destitute villages and farms, and contrasted it with “other countries” where “the soldiers were kept in secret places.” Upon arrival at the Commune, he gathered data on categories of workers and their earnings of bread per day from his interpreter. She told him that third category workers received 300 grams of poor bread per day, while first and second category workers received 800 and 600 to 500 grams of bread per day, respectively.⁹⁵ The interpreter’s intention in delivering the data at the Commune was to emphasize that the kolkhoz (collective farm) was not sufficiently feeding the people of Ukraine. Indeed, the president of the Commune boasted about completing “a counter plan of 20% more than the Government plan for the commune”, and admitted a preference towards selling produce to the Government instead of at the kolkhoz bazaars.⁹⁶

Upon returning to Kyiv, Cairns decided to confront the local government guide as to why “peasants on the right side of Ukraine had sown, up to June 15th, only 44%, and the collective farms only 72% of the spring seeding plan.” After the guide attempted to obfuscate the question, he argued that there was a seed shortage resulting from “over enthusiastic” local communists who sought to fulfill both Government collection plans and counter plans. Cairns emphasized that such an answer was inadequate given the excessive demonization of Ukraine in the Moscow

⁹³ Ibid, 107.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 109.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 112.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 113.

press, to which the guide rationalized by conceding “that the plan had been too high but that it was not the fault of the central authorities as they had been supplied with wrong information and too optimistic estimates of yields by the communist party locals.” The interpreter then remarked that the government guide had fabricated the details of the fiasco, contending that “the Moscow planners had been much too optimistic, especially regarding Ukraine, and that all last autumn and winter many people were talking about the unreality of the plan.”⁹⁷ Cairns then asked her what the consequences were for openly declaring impossibility of the plan, to which the interpreter replied: “If you were a Russian they certainly would have put you in prison!”⁹⁸ The British Foreign Office expressed appreciation of Cairns detailed report and noted his careful attention in identifying key details that were lacking in other reports which readily accepted positive data crafted by Communist Party members.

In August 1932, Strang reported that the collective farm trade was a sham to placate the starving peasants, and far from actualizing in trade, was a method of transferring grain to hungry urban workers, who were also starving as a result of the tiered system of food allowance. Far from removing the “new *bourgeois* class” of Moscow that emerged during the NEP, who were arbitrarily labelled as “responsible workers”, the ever-delayed collective farm trade coupled with draconian pilferage policies and grain quotas enabled the growth of “better restaurants ... established for their regalement [“specialists”], including a show boat on the river.” Many of these specialists were “American Jews of Russian origin” who had access to luxurious living

⁹⁷ Ibid, 116.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 116.

accommodations, while ordinary native-born factory workers were “living without accommodation” in half-built towns.⁹⁹

Towards the latter part of August 1932, speculation in connection with the collective farm trade was made illegal with penalties of up to ten years imprisonment in concentration camps, further exacerbating the penalty of death for pilferage. Strang emphasized that the terms “kulak” and “speculator” had no intrinsic meaning as defined by the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People’s Commissars. Rather they were “elastic terms” which included “a peasant possessing certain machines or more than a certain number of cows or livestock” or “a man who steals grain or spare parts, or disapproves of collectivization, or, by an almost incredible extension, a man who disapproves of the prevailing theory of payment by results ...”¹⁰⁰ The reports indicate that the policy designed to persecute the Ukrainian peasantry and cause workers to be wholly dependent on the whims of the party was in full effect by the autumn of 1932. Thus, the British Foreign Office was fully aware of the ongoing atrocity in Ukraine. Additionally, the demographic data of the elite class of “specialists” in Moscow, being largely American Jews of Russian descent, indicate increasingly entrenched ethnic bifurcations under Stalin.

Strang entered into a series of exchanges with Duranty from October 1932 to December 1932, in which Duranty admitted to Strang that since 1929 “the deportation of the kulaks has swept the countryside of the most enterprising, skilled, and industrious part of its population.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ “*Situation in the Soviet Union: William Strang (Moscow), to Sir John Simon, 14 August 1932,*” Carynnyk, Luciuk, and Kordan, *The Foreign Office and the famine: British documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-1933*, 170.

¹⁰⁰ “*Efforts to Stamp Out Speculation in Connexion with Collective Farm Trade: Willing Strang (Moscow) to Sir John Simon, 25 August 1932,*” Carynnyk, Luciuk, and Kordan, *The Foreign Office and the famine: British documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-1933*, 196.

¹⁰¹ “*Agricultural Situation in the Soviet Union: Conversation by William Strang (Moscow) with Walter Duranty, 21 October 1932,*” Carynnyk, Luciuk, and Kordan, *The Foreign Office and the famine: British documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-1933*, 202.

Additionally, livestock was reduced to “40 percent of the population in 1929”, and tractor use was made impossible due to the weedy characteristics of the grain crop. Duranty appears to have been aware that once the fruit and vegetable season ended by December, there would not be any grain to sell on the open market. For this reason, Duranty argued that the Soviet army reserves in the Far East would avoid war with Japan at all costs, as to avert the predicament of needing to import grain from abroad due to war.¹⁰² Even so, the grain reserves in the Far East would not be available for the peasantry, but delivered to “the industrial proletariat ...” Duranty also suggested that the Soviet Union adopt a strong anti-Japanese policy in exchange for loans and recognition from the United States and permit the United States to engage in “reconditioning or exploitation on a technical aid basis of part of the railway system, of the gold-producing industry, or even some of the Soviet giant industrial enterprises.” A final point Duranty emphasized was that there was “no sign of any actively subversive or insurrectionary movement.”¹⁰³

It had been established by the British Foreign Office that hard evidence of insurrectionary activities among the peasants or party members was virtually non-existent. But on January 3rd, 1933 “the *Izvestiya* reported a trial at which three former members of the local Government of a rayon in the Ukraine had been condemned to the ‘supreme measure of social defence’ and nine others to long terms of penal servitude for their ‘malicious sabotage of the grain-collection’ campaign.”¹⁰⁴ Other persecutions arose sporadically during January 1933 including exposure of anti-revolutionary family history among the so called “kulaks” as well as ordinary agricultural workers, and party purges of “slackers” and “wreckers”, former being defined as people

¹⁰² Ibid, 203.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 204.

¹⁰⁴ “Sir Esmond Ovey (Moscow) to Sir John Simon: 14 January 1933,” Carynnyk, Luciuk, and Kordan, *The Foreign Office and the famine: British documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-1933*, 211.

“indifferent to the party’s injunctions” and the latter as those “who endeavor to organise opposition.”¹⁰⁵ Sir Esmond Ovey¹⁰⁶ noted in his dispatch that such persecutions did not yield better results for the grain collection campaign. It would appear that the persecutions were driven by scapegoating in reaction to the failure of collectivization, rather than hard evidence of counter-revolutionary conspiracy.

Conditions escalated to military occupation in certain regions of the Soviet Union by March 1933. On March 13th, 1933 Sir Esmond Ovey received information from Malcolm Muggeridge of the *Manchester Guardian* that the Ukrainian-speaking Kuban province in southwestern Russia along the Black sea “is becoming a desert, inhabited by starving peasants and occupied by well-fed troops.”¹⁰⁷ Foreign press reporters were advised to remain in Moscow “for the next month or two” and a removal of visitors “from cities where conditions are particularly bad” was put into effect.¹⁰⁸ By late March 1933, the British Embassy in Moscow received numerous letters emphasizing the continued severity of the famine under Stalin. One letter was from a “Russian now in the Ukraine” who had his one horse, one cow, and four hectares land taken by the Soviet Government, and another letter came from “a British subject living in the Urals” who reported that grain has risen to “100 roubles the pood”¹⁰⁹, and that in addition to the “severe penalties awaiting grain thieves ... someone crept into our half ruined storehouse and stole ten poods of grain, which we were keeping by us for the autumn sowing

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 211-212.

¹⁰⁶ British Ambassador to the Soviet Union, 1929-1933.

¹⁰⁷ “*Conditions in Soviet Union: Sir Esmond Ovey (Moscow) to Sir John Simon, 13 March 1933,*” Carynnyk, Luciuk, and Kordan, *The Foreign Office and the famine: British documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-1933*, 217.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 218.

¹⁰⁹ A pood is equivalent to 16.38 kilograms.

...”¹¹⁰ In the minutes section of this particular document, the British Foreign Office acknowledged that the influx of letters verify the reports of catastrophe indicated by Gareth Jones at the *Daily Express*.¹¹¹ This demonstrates the veracity of Jones’ reports and indicates that diplomats had supporting evidence that refuted the claims made by Duranty in *The New York Times*.

In early April 1933, a letter reached the British Embassy stating that in Ukraine “the Communist administration has ruined the working people and has reduced them to starvation, barbarity, and even cannibalism. After the words ‘England, save us who are dying of hunger; help us get rid of the Bolsheviks,’ the letter is signed by ‘The Committee of One Hundred,’ and a postscript adds: ‘Oh, Mr. Ambassador! We cannot express in a letter all our misery; we are being forced to cannibalism ... save us!’”¹¹² Alerted by the influx of letters, William Strang wrote to Sir John Simon, the Foreign Secretary, that the starving peasants of the Soviet Union had no interest in impairing Anglo-Soviet relations, but were acting out of political and economic desperation due to forced starvation, and enslavement in compulsory labor camps.¹¹³ Strang noted that in one of the letters, the author stated that the Bolsheviks were “robbing the people, pulling down churches, setting up slave colonies of prisoners while they themselves can live in the Kremlin and datchas and watering place and enjoy themselves.” In the same letter,

¹¹⁰ “*Conditions in Soviet Union*: British Embassy, Moscow, to the Northern Department of the Foreign Office, 27 March 1933,” Carynnyk, Luciuk, and Kordan, *The Foreign Office and the famine: British documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-1933*, 221.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 222.

¹¹² “*Conditions among Population of Soviet Union*: William Strang (Moscow) to Sir John Simon, 9 April 1933,” Carynnyk, Luciuk, and Kordan, *The Foreign Office and the famine: British documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-1933*, 224.

¹¹³ “*Situation in Soviet Union*: William Strang (Moscow) to Sir John Simon, 8 May 1933,” Carynnyk, Luciuk, and Kordan, *The Foreign Office and the famine: British documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-1933*, 227.

the author alleges the Soviet Government of “bribing the foreign press”, which Strang was inclined to believe due to the conspicuous absence of these letters from foreign newspapers.¹¹⁴

No initiative had been launched by Britain to alleviate the suffering of the peasants despite the influx of letters describing life under Stalin from Soviet citizens. By June 1933, Ukrainians were so aggrieved by their suffering, sympathies for Hitler and accusations of hypocrisy and deception in Western policy towards the Soviet Union began to be documented by the British Foreign Office. A letter signed by a “Poor Russian Peasant” [from Kyiv, Ukraine] delivered to British Embassy reads ...

H.M Embassy

... Is it really possible that the representatives of the civilised powers do not know that hunger stalks our land, that the people curse life and do not expect release from the yoke of the Bolsheviks, for they themselves are incapable of achieving it through physical weakness caused by need, hunger, and moral torments.

Can it really be that the civilised powers do not know that with us everything is built to deceive, and that the real object is the abolition of capitalist society. That is why they build factories and workshops.

Are the civilised powers really incapable of un-masking the Jewish-Soviet machinations: to sell at a loss to undermine the competition of goods produced by capitalists?

Do they know that to buy our goods is to aggravate the famine and want amongst our people who are dying therefrom. To buy our goods is to strengthen the Bolshevik party and to increase its vehemence in annihilating the purchasers.

Will not the Economic Conference understand the deceits of Litvinov, who in his lips will preach world peace, but who is the first to be ready to shoot the inhabitants of the capitalist world. He preaches the abolition of the economic blockade, while all foreign commerce is conducted with a view to destroying the trade of capitalists.

... They have provided machines but the country has no shoes. They build up kolhozes but the peasants die of hunger.

It is a shame that the people of Europe should eat Russian bread while hunger mercilessly mows down the human beings and animals of our country.

... “We have no out-of-works.” Lie. The towns are full of them.

“We have no hunger.” Jewish deceit. Go to the Ukraine. There they eat dogs and like things.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 228.

It is a shameful thing for the Soviet delegation to pour forth lies and deceit in soft words before all the world. Liars, murderers of the torture chamber. In London they will be like the Moscow shops with the signboards: “Here is sold “tea, sugar, meat” and so on, while in reality there is only adulterated drink.

... If you buy our wheat and foodstuffs, you intensify the hunger and the suffering of the people. You strengthen the development of Bolshevism, which like a wild beast will eat your children.

Only Hitler knows the truth, what they really represent, these friends who with lies proclaim world peace. Cease buying our corn and food-stuffs. Let them stay with us to feed our people. Remember that our corn will be poison for the whole of the capitalist world. Our trade – the worm for your nation.

Poor Russian Peasant

Ivanenko

30/5/1933

T. C. R. 13/6/1933¹¹⁵

The letter reveals a startling reality about Western policy during the *Holodomor*. Despite its comprehensive and growing knowledge of the famine, Western powers did not cease trade with the Soviet Union. Instead of emphasizing humanitarian concerns, the author of the letter pleaded with the British to reevaluate their economic policy with Moscow in the event of a Bolshevik conquest of the West. There is a rebuke of those who suggest that the suffering peasants take it upon themselves to overthrow the Bolsheviks because they were already weakened by the forced famine. Undoubtedly, the letter contains scapegoating of “Jews” as being the architects of the famine. It is necessary to mention that the documents of the British Foreign Office indicate that Stalin kept American Jews in a privileged position during the famine and Maksim Litvinov was of Jewish descent. The criminal mistreatment of Ukraine and the indifference of the British, as well as other Western powers indicate that such anti-Semitic

¹¹⁵ “*Comment by Soviet Citizens on Situation in Soviet Union: British Embassy, Moscow, to the Northern Department of the Foreign Office, 19 June 1933,*” Carynnyk, Luciuk, and Kordan, *The Foreign Office and the famine: British documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-1933*, 236-238.

frustrations likely manifested due to the economic and political realities of Western-Soviet relations that resulted in mass murder of the Ukrainian people.

By July 1933, the worst of the famine was over and estimates of those killed by starvation began to be calculated. The British Foreign Office recorded an estimate of 10 million (albeit unauthorized) dead throughout the entirety of the Soviet Union, while the Soviet press decried such suggestions to be “Fascist lies.” The Soviet propaganda of the famine-event being a figment of the fascist imagination was further inflamed by the assistance fund Germany established for Volga German settlements.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, Strang emphasized that the Soviet authorities anticipated mass death against enemy classes as a product of the Five-Year Plan, and that they were “confident victory will be theirs” and that there “is little prospect that the privations of the people can offer any immediate threat to the stability of the regime, failing a shock from outside such as a foreign war, or even that they will impose any substantial change in the policy of the party.”¹¹⁷ In that same month, it was noted that the Kuban Cossacks were “forcibly uprooted from their villages and deported to the Ural territories, thus practically annihilated ... The last living remnants will be finally demolished before the end of the year through famine.”¹¹⁸

The evidence of famine throughout the Soviet Union, particularly in Ukraine and the Kuban was by then overwhelming. Between letters from suffering peasants and brutality specific to particular regions and peoples, denial of the famine was near impossible. Yet British

¹¹⁶ “*Conditions in Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*: William Strang (Moscow) to Sir John Simon, 17 July 1933,” Carynyk, Luciuk, and Kordan, *The Foreign Office and the famine: British documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-1933*, 255.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 257.

¹¹⁸ “*Conditions in Northern Caucasus in Spring of 1933*: Report by Otto Schiller, German Agricultural Attaché in Moscow, 23 May 1933, Forwarded to Anthony Eden by the Duchess of Atholl, July 1933,” Carynyk, Luciuk, and Kordan, *The Foreign Office and the famine: British documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-1933*, 259.

diplomats created excuses to justify their lack of commitment to helping the famine victims. In a letter to Sir Robert Vansittart, L. B. Golden, the General Secretary of the Save the Children Fund, acknowledged that Ukraine and the Northern Caucasus region was experiencing a calamity. Unfortunately, the Fund would not provide belief because of “the denial by the Soviet Government of the existence of a famine”¹¹⁹ About a week after this statement, the Foreign Office was informed that “that they did not at any time wish to take any action which might be embarrassing to His Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom.”¹²⁰ Golden was not specific as to why making an appeal would embarrass the British government, but a consistent unwillingness of the British government to openly condemn the Soviet Union for their genocidal policy towards the Ukrainian peasantry and Kuban Cossacks could certainly explain why the British government might be embarrassed.

Édouard Herriot, a radical French politician, also feigned ignorance of the famine. Herriot was interested in forming an alliance between the Soviet Union and France due to the rise of Nazi Germany. The British Foreign Office documented his trip to the Soviet Union in August 1933, while the Save the Children Fund dilemma was unfolding in Britain. Herriot visited the Soviet Union with the intention of bringing “peace” which “would benefit both the Soviet Union and France.”¹²¹ He reported that Ukraine enjoyed complete harmony under the Soviet Government with workers and authorities seamlessly creating “respect for the spirit of socialism with respect for the Ukrainian spirit.”¹²² He even alleged that the notions of famine in

¹¹⁹ “*Famine in Russia*: L. B. Golden, General Secretary of the Save the Children Fund, to Robert Vansittart, 24 August 1933, and the Foreign Office to Edward Coote,” Carynnyk, Luciuk, and Kordan, *The Foreign Office and the famine: British documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-1933*, 287.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 289.

¹²¹ “*Visit of Monsieur Herriot to Soviet Union*: Edward Coote (Moscow) to Sir John Simon, 11 September 1933,” Carynnyk, Luciuk, and Kordan, *The Foreign Office and the famine: British documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-1933*, 297.

¹²² *Ibid*, 298.

Ukraine were “gross libels.”¹²³ Officials at the British Foreign Office knew that such claims were false, given the data regarding the Soviet-directed grain requisitions and their knowledge of the mass arrests of “Ukrainian Communist Nationalists” carried out in August 1933.¹²⁴

In September 1933, the European Federation of Ukrainians Abroad attempted to persuade London and the British delegates to the League of Nations to reverse course and provide some organized aid to Ukraine. In an impassioned memorandum to Sir John Simon, the organization emphasized that the suffering of Ukraine and the Ukrainian-speaking regions of the Northern Caucasus were conducted in the name of “Muscovite Bolshevism” who sought to transform a prosperous and well-populated nation into a colony sealed from the outside world, existing solely for selling grain on the international markets to benefit Soviet leaders in Moscow.¹²⁵ The memorandum affirmed that Ukrainians always resisted Bolshevik invasion and desired to be a separate nation from Russia. For this reason, “collectivization is hitting 80 per cent of the farms, while in Muscovy it barely affects 40 per cent. This explains why the famine is confined to Ukrainian regions, the biggest wheat producers, while Muscovy, according to numerous attestations, has known only a shortage of provisions and not famine.”¹²⁶ The memorandum concluded with a suggestion that the Soviets were planning to replace native Ukrainians with Muscovites who were more sympathetic to communist ideology. It argued that destroying Ukraine was necessary for population replacement to be carried out effectively. Additionally, the excision of the Ukrainian nation would “remove the natural barrier that has been raised for centuries between Western Europe and Muscovy” which would invariably result in danger for

¹²³ Ibid, 302.

¹²⁴ “*Situation in the Ukraine: Memorandum by W. G. Walton, 10 August 1933,*” Carynnyk, Luciuk, and Kordan, *The Foreign Office and the famine: British documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-1933*, 276.

¹²⁵ “*Famine in Ukraine: Memorandum by the European Federation of Ukrainians Abroad to Sir John Simon, 27 September 1933,*” Carynnyk, Luciuk, and Kordan, *The Foreign Office and the famine: British documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-1933*, 317-319.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 319.

the security of Western Civilization.¹²⁷ The letter concluded that the Western nations were obliged to save Ukraine through the League of Nations which was designed to defend the interests of all nations and peoples and they could “not long remain deaf and mute before the most abominable political crime recorded in the annals of modern times.”¹²⁸

The response to the memorandum was more skepticism and an unwillingness to ascribe culpability to the Soviets. According to the British Foreign Office, the memorandum was too “anti-Soviet in complexion” and thus had to be ignored. The British Foreign Office re-affirmed its position that as long as the Soviet Union was unwilling to acknowledge the existence of the famine, representatives advocating for “immediately stopping the economic and political practices that in fact are leading to the extermination of the Ukrainian population” as suggested by European Federation of Ukrainians Abroad would have to be denied.¹²⁹

Tragically, the response of the British Foreign Office left Ukraine in a quandary. Relief and advocacy would be denied because of lack of cooperation from the Soviet Union, the very entity that engineered the process that led to starvation, deportation, and violent occupation. The British Foreign Office failed to acknowledge the hypocrisy in engaging in business with Moscow, which was the mechanism by which Ukraine was deprived of its grain, or how political expedience, personal ambition, and diplomatic interests inhibited London from fully acknowledging and sending aid to the famine victims in Ukraine. The documentation of the famine by the British Foreign Office demonstrates that the maintenance of economic and political peace between the Soviet Union and London triumphed over a desire to aid Ukraine.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 320.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 320.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 320-321.

Conclusion

When perusing the historical documents of the British Foreign Office, as well as the newspaper reports of Jones, Duranty, and Muggeridge, it becomes readily apparent that the Soviet Union committed heinous crimes against the Ukrainian peasantry and the Ukrainian-speaking Kuban Cossacks. Through draconian economic policy, even the idea of an autonomous Ukraine or an independent Ukrainian-speaking entity was crushed. If signs of nationalism were detected, rounds of deportation, execution, and exacerbation of requisition policy were implemented. Despite the courageous efforts of Jones and the influx of letters to the British Foreign Office, the great majority of British diplomats, as well as *the New York Times*, *Manchester Guardian*, Duranty, and Roosevelt Administration cooperated with the Soviet Union in covering up the genocide in Ukraine. And they succeeded due to the slander of Jones and the demonization of the Ukrainian people, as well as back-door cooperation with Soviet Officials with whom they sought to establish economic and political relationships. This invariably necessitates a brief discussion on the politics of genocide recognition and how some crimes against humanity are swiftly covered up and forgotten while others are more readily acknowledged.

Applebaum correctly pointed out that the *Guardian* had historical sympathies with the Soviet Union, as demonstrated by the conflict between Jones and the *Manchester Guardian* regarding accurate reports about Soviet treatment of Ukraine. Additionally, the failure and hypocrisy of progressive institutions to acknowledge their own racial, economic, and religious biases, as demonstrated by Duranty, the Pulitzer Prize committee, and the Roosevelt Administration, in evaluating atrocity and providing aid to victims of genocide persists to this day. When a particular nation is labeled as superstitious or described to be anti-modern or

religious, recognition can be especially difficult. For example, Tarik Cyril Amar in “Politics, Starvation, and Memory: A Critique of *Red Famine*” disregards the privileged position of irreligious American Jews in comparison to Ukrainians that Stalin established in conjunction with his atrocity in Ukraine and focuses only how “interwar Ukrainian nationalism was, quite realistically, increasingly focused on what it had in common with fascism, not on the purported differences that would be stressed after the latter’s defeat in World War II.”¹³⁰ Emphasizing these points disregards the nuances of Ukrainian nationalism and perpetuates the stereotype preponderant in progressive institutions that certain nationalisms are inherently racist and anti-Semitic. Additionally, it deflects from the complicity of progressive institutions in the cover-up of the Ukrainian genocide as a result of political and economic opportunism as well as through racial stereotyping and scapegoating. Lastly, whatever participation that Ukrainians may have had in World War II against Jews should not be used to deflect from the very real ethnic bifurcations that coincided with the *Holodomor*.

This topic is also very important because cover-up of genocides due to political and economic expediency, as well as a tendency to disregard groups defined by their religiosity (whether accurate or not) and supposed backwardness influences the relative unconsciousness of the Kurdish persecution of the Assyrian Christians. Within progressive circles the Kurds have been defined as a beacon of secularism and economic progressivism in the Middle East, yet reports of their assaults on Assyrian Churches and educational institutions are virtually unknown and the appeal of Assyrians to gain recognition and aid from international organizations has been long and difficult. In a January 2017 report “Assyrians Under Kurdish Rule: The Situation in Northeastern Syria,” Silvia Ulloa of the Assyrian Confederation of Europe identifies several

¹³⁰ Tarik Cyril Amar, "Politics, Starvation, and Memory: A Critique of *Red Famine*," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 20, no. 1 (2019): 152.

incidents of persecution by the YPG against Assyrian Christians. He points out that “the Kurdish forces occupy and utilize Assyrian facilities at will,” as well as rewriting Assyrian textbooks by having “Assyrian location names being changed to Kurdish ones; the Biblical King Nebuchadnezzar’s wife being described as a Kurdish woman; and maps that shrink the countries of Iran, Turkey, Syria and Iraq in favor of a ‘Greater Kurdistan.’”¹³¹ Additionally, the Kurds at various points during the Syrian War incited ISIS against the Assyrians, primarily by creating “deliberate incitement of conflict between the Assyrians and Islamic State”¹³²

The details of the ongoing conflict in Syria between the Kurds and the Assyrians are beyond the scope of this paper, but the general principle of selectivity and hypocrisy by progressive institutions in regard to their approach to genocide and events pre-cursing genocide remain the same. The intersection of political, economic, and personal ambitions, as well as prevailing theories of modernization and progressivism have influenced Western decisions to cover-up atrocities, or worse yet, rationalize such atrocities as they unfold. Genocide is a horrendous crime regardless of the nationality or religion of the victims. Recognition should be swift and spontaneous because the value of human life should prevail over economic and political considerations. If this principle is absorbed into international politics and into the definition of genocide, perhaps no persecuted nation or people would have to suffer from unrecognition anymore.

¹³¹ Silvia Ulloa, “Assyrians Under Kurdish Rule: The Situation in Northeastern Syria,” *Assyrian Confederation of Europe*: (January 2017), 7-8. <http://www.aina.org/reports/ace201701.pdf>.

¹³² *Ibid*, 14.

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