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Edited by Helen Fein

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To Orlanda Brugnola

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Preface

This volume reflects the record of a conference which would not have taken place without the commitment of the Institute for the Study of Genocide officers and board, the active participation of Orlanda Brugnola (president of the ISG) and Herbert F. Spier (vice president), and the facilities of the John Jay College for Criminal Justice.

Besides the authors of this volume, other conference participants who contributed talks or discussions that also shaped our intellectual collaboration include Lloyd Binagi (University of Wisconsin), David Burgess (U.S. State Department Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs), Frank Chalk (Concordia Institute for Genocide Studies), Richard Cohen (*Washington Post*), Roberta Cohen (Refugee Policy Group), Patricia Weiss Fagen (U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees), Jack Geiger, M.D. (City University of New York), David Hawk (Cambodia Documentation Commission), Mab Huang (State University of New York College at Oswego), Thomas D. Lobe (University of South Dakota), André Maislinger (University of Innsbruck), George Lopez

lages. The Iraqi army lost control of the message and, by seizing film and attempting to censor a reporter's dispatch, revealed that—too late—they realized their mistake.

But if the reporter's observations and interviews cast doubt on the statements of propagandists, the quoting of diverse viewpoints and the quest for objectivity can also cause readers to doubt what really happened. As one Amnesty International activist lamented to me, with so many bad things in the world to worry about, how much time will a reader have to be outraged about a merely "alleged" atrocity? If the propagandist's goal is to dampen outrage and prevent intervention, it may be sufficient to sow doubt and keep ambiguity alive.

Journalists realize this and have various ways of breaking free of the fuzzifying conventions of newswriting. Reporters on the scene may write an "analysis," dropping the pretense of objectivity and saying what they think really happened. Columns and editorials can also express openly the writer's point of view.

This is not to say that ambiguity should be dropped from news reporting. Where uncertainty exists, good reporting will convey that uncertainty. But the best reporting will seek aggressively to get beyond the uncertainty as quickly and as accurately as possible. Learning to gather and evaluate the statements of refugees may prove to be a key to reporting on atrocities and genocide.

James E. Mace

Chapter 8

THE AMERICAN PRESS AND THE UKRAINIAN FAMINE

AUTHOR'S NOTE: During my studies in history at the University of Michigan, I wrote a doctoral dissertation on Ukrainian communism—later published as *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983)—and became aware of how Ukrainian cultural and political life was virtually extinguished by the famine of 1933. Later, I worked with Robert Conquest in researching *Harvest of Sorrow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), which documents the Ukrainian famine. Between 1986 and 1990, I served as staff director of the U.S. Government Commission on the Ukraine Famine, whose report to Congress determined that the famine was an act of genocide for which Stalin was directly responsible.

In 1932–1933 several million Soviet citizens, most of them Ukrainians, starved to death in a famine organized by Joseph Stalin and his closest collaborators. In brief outline, what happened was this: at the end of 1929, Stalin decreed a crash policy of forced collectivization throughout the Soviet Union. As a result, agricultural

production declined precipitously. In the spring of 1930 and again in early 1932, he decreed temporary measures to ameliorate the situation, even sanctioning food aid for peasants east of the Volga River in 1932. But he abruptly reversed course that summer when he was warned of impending mass starvation in the Ukrainian republic and the North Caucasus territory, areas that constituted the main stumbling blocks to the centralization of political and administrative authority in his hands. He ordered a campaign of grain seizures, sanctioning a level of force unparalleled even in the history of Stalinism: everything that could be eaten was taken from those who had produced it. At the same time, the relative autonomy Ukrainians had hitherto enjoyed was suppressed, and every manifestation of Ukrainian cultural distinctiveness was condemned as "bourgeois nationalism."¹

All the while, the authorities completely denied their activities and lauded the happy life in the Soviet countryside. Even starving peasant children were told by their schoolteachers that any mention of the everyday reality of the starvation around them was "anti-Soviet" propaganda; they were taught to sing "Thank You, Comrade Stalin, for a Happy Childhood."² At home and abroad, Stalin made every attempt to conceal the famine and to deny those reports that managed to surface. In this he was aided by a number of prominent Moscow correspondents for American newspapers.

1. See, e.g., Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Commission on the Ukraine Famine, *Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine, 1932-1933: Report to Congress* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988); Roman Serbyn and Bohdan Krawchenko, eds., *Famine in Ukraine, 1932-1933* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1986); James E. Mace, "The Man-Made Famine of 1933 in Soviet Ukraine," in *Toward the Understanding and Prevention of Genocide: Proceedings of the International Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide*, ed. Israel Charny (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1984), 67-83; James E. Mace, "Famine and Nationalism in Soviet Ukraine," *Problems of Communism*, May-June 1984, 37-50; James E. Mace, "The Politics of Famine: American Government and Press Response to the Ukrainian Famine, 1932-1933," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 3, no. 1 (April 1988): 75-94.

2. James E. Mace and Leonid Heretz, eds., *Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine, 1932-1933: Oral History Project of the Commission on the Ukraine Famine* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), I: 407; II: 607.

The story broke in March 1933 when Gareth Jones, a British student of Russian history and former aide to David Lloyd George, returned from an unauthorized trip to Ukraine. He declared: "I walked alone through villages and twelve collective farms. Everywhere was the cry, 'There is no bread; we are dying.'" He also estimated that a million people had perished in Kazakhstan since 1930, a number that now seems conservative, and that in Ukraine millions more were threatened.³ Eugene Lyons, at the time the United Press Moscow correspondent, called this the first reliable press report published in the English-speaking world.⁴

Another British correspondent reported the famine at about the same time as Jones. Malcolm Muggeridge recalled that the famine "was the big story in all our talks in Moscow. Everybody knew about it. . . . Anyone you were talking to knew that there was a terrible famine going on. . . . I could see that all the correspondents in Moscow were distorting it. Without making any kind of plans or asking for permission, I just went and got a ticket for Kiev and then went on to Rostov. . . . Ukraine was starving, and you only had to venture out to smaller places to see derelict fields and abandoned villages."⁵ Muggeridge's unsigned account, published in the *Manchester Guardian* at the end of March, stated that in both Ukraine and the North Caucasus, "it was the same story—cattle and horses dead; fields neglected; meagre harvest despite moderately good climatic conditions; all the grain that was produced taken by the Government; now no bread at all, no bread anywhere, nothing much else either: despair and bewilderment."⁶ In another, signed article published in May, after he left the Soviet Union, he wrote:

3. "Famine in Russia, An Englishman's Story: What He Saw on a Walking Tour," *Manchester Guardian*, March 30, 1933, 12.

4. Eugene Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1937), 572.

5. Marco Carynyk, "Malcolm Muggeridge on Stalin's Famine: 'Deliberate' and 'Diabolical' Starvation," in *The Great Famine in Ukraine: The Unknown Holocaust* (Jersey City: Ukrainian National Association, 1983), 47.

6. "The Soviet and the Peasantry: An Observer's Notes. II. Hunger in the Ukraine," *Manchester Guardian*, March 27, 1933, 10.

On a recent visit to the North Caucasus and Ukraine, I saw something of the battle that is going on between the Government and their peasants. The battlefield was as desolate as in any war, and stretches wider. . . . On one side, millions of peasants, starving, often their bodies swollen with lack of food; on the other, soldiers, members of the GPU, carrying out the instruction of the dictatorship of the proletariat. They had gone over the country like a swarm of locusts and taken away everything edible; they had shot and exiled thousands of peasants, sometimes whole villages; they had reduced some of the most fertile land in the world to a melancholy desert.⁷

William Henry Chamberlin, the initially pro-Soviet Moscow correspondent of the *Christian Science Monitor*, had reported as early as July 1933 that though there was no actual starvation in Moscow, "Grim stories of out-and-out hunger come from southern and south-eastern Russia, from the Ukraine, the North Caucasus and from Kazakhstan, where the nomadic natives seem to have suffered very much as a result of the wholesale perishing of their livestock."⁸ In April 1934, after leaving the Soviet Union, he published an article in *Foreign Affairs*, confirming yet again that the famine had taken place and giving ample "refutation of the idea that as a result of collectivization, Russian agriculture will leap forward."⁹ In May Chamberlin reported that during the preceding year "more than 4 million peasants are found to have perished."¹⁰ In his book *Russia's Iron Age*, published in October, he estimated the death toll as a direct result of the famine of 1932–1933 to be not less than 10 percent of the population of the areas affected, according to the local officials with whom he had spoken.¹¹

7. Malcolm Muggeridge, "The Soviet's War on the Peasants," *Fortnightly Review* 39 (May 1933): 564.

8. W. H. Chamberlin, "Rations Given U.S. Jobless Enough for Soviet Official, Amazed Russian Workers Say," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 3, 1933, 1.

9. W. H. Chamberlin, "Ordeal of the Russian Peasantry," *Foreign Affairs*, April 1934, 506.

10. W. H. Chamberlin, "Famine Proves Potent Weapon in Soviet Policy," *Christian Science Monitor*, May 29, 1934, 1. Second of thirteen articles serialized under the heading "Russia without Benefit of Censor," May 28–June 18, 1935.

11. W. H. Chamberlin, *Russia's Iron Age* (Boston: Little Brown, 1934), 367–368.

Yet, despite these and other accounts, the famine story was quickly contained. Ignored at the time it took place, the famine was so quickly forgotten that it ranks as history's most successful instance of the denial of genocide by the perpetrators. The United Press Moscow correspondent at the time of the famine, Eugene Lyons, wrote in 1937, "Years after the event, when no Russian Communist in his senses any longer concealed the magnitude of the famine—the question whether there had been a famine at all was still being disputed in the outside world."¹²

DILUTING THE FACTS WITH EUPHEMISM

The initial containment of the story is perhaps the crucial event in what Lyons called "the whole shabby episode of our failure to report honestly the gruesome Russian famine of 1932–33."¹³ Jones had based his account not only on visits to twenty villages but also on what he had been told by diplomats and other Western correspondents in Moscow.¹⁴ Diplomats, however, were forbidden to publish their observations, and the journalists were circumspect because they had much to lose, including their visas.¹⁵

12. Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia*, 577–578.

13. *Ibid.*, 572.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 575; Gareth Jones, "Mr. Jones Replies: Former Secretary of Lloyd George Tells of Observations in Russia," *New York Times*, May 13, 1933, 12.

15. For example, in January 1933, Ralph Barnes reported to the old *New York Herald Tribune* from the then Ukrainian capital of Kharkiv, a place under the watchful eye of the Soviet censor but also one in which the famine was already painfully evident. Barnes wrote not about what he must have seen but rather about the officially acknowledged "abuses" of the previous year: "Grain needed by the Ukrainian peasants as provisions was stripped from the land a year ago by grain collectors desirous of making a good showing. The temporary or permanent migration of great masses which followed alone prevented real famine conditions. All those persons with whom I have talked, in both town and village, agree that the food situation in this vast area is worse than it was last year. It is inconceivable, though, that the authorities will let the bread shortage on the collective farms reach a stage comparable to that of the late winter and spring of last year." Ralph W. Barnes, "Grain Shortage in the Ukraine Results in Admitted Failure of the Soviet Agricultural Plan," *New York Herald Tribune*, January 15, 1933, sec. II, p. 5. By contrast, a Ukrainian who arrived in Kharkiv

In dealing with foreign correspondents, the Soviet authorities held the trumps. Correspondents lived in the Soviet Union at the government's sufferance and could be expelled at any time. They had to submit their stories to censorship before the state-owned telegraph agency would send them out. Jones could not have cabled his story from Moscow; he spoke out only after leaving. Had Muggeridge signed his stories in the *Manchester Guardian*, which were sent by British diplomatic pouch, he would have been summarily expelled. Correspondents also depended on the authorities for access to the news on which their jobs depended. News is, after all, a competitive business, and the state could always see to it that correspondents were singly or collectively admitted or denied access to news.

Immediately after the Jones and Muggeridge stories appeared, Moscow responded by forbidding journalists to travel to famine-stricken areas, thereby denying them direct access to the story.¹⁶ At the same time, the Soviet authorities blatantly used another story to which the state controlled access, a show trial of British engineers employed by the Metropolitan Vickers Corporation. When Jones

the preceding month, i.e., at least two weeks before the above story was filed, later recalled that at the time of his arrival the railroad station was already crowded by starving beggars, and the dead and dying were already being loaded into freight cars to be transported outside the city. Oleksa Hay-Holowko, "The World Should Be Made Aware of Its Greatest Tragedy," *Ukrainian-Canadian Review*, February 1985, 24.

16. Lyons recalled: "We were summoned to the Press Department one by one and instructed not to venture out of Moscow without submitting a detailed itinerary and having it officially sanctioned. In effect, therefore, we were summarily deprived of the right of unhampered travel in the country to which we were accredited.

"This is nothing new," Umansky grimaced uncomfortably. "Such a rule has been in existence since the beginning of the revolution. Now we have decided to enforce it."

"New or old, such a rule had not been invoked since the civil war days. It was forgotten again when the famine was ended. Its undisguised purpose was to keep us out of the stricken regions. The same department which daily issued denials of the famine now acted to prevent us from seeing it with our own eyes. Our brief cables about this desperate measure of concealment were published, if at all, in some obscure corner of the paper. The world press accepted with complete equanimity the virtual expulsion of all its representatives from all of Russia except Moscow. It agreed without protest to a partnership in the macabre hoax." Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia*, 576.

broke the story of the famine, Lyons recalled how the matter was settled in cooperation with Konstantin Umansky, the Soviet censor-in-chief:

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

Throwing down Jones was as unpleasant a chore as fell to any of us in years of juggling the facts to please dictatorial regimes—but throw him down we did, unanimously and in almost identical formulas of equivocation. . . . The scene in which the American press corps combined to repudiate Jones is fresh in my mind. It was in the evening and Comrade Umansky, the soul of graciousness, consented to meet us in the hotel room of a correspondent. He knew he had a strategic advantage over us because of the Metro-Vickers story. He could afford to be gracious. Forced by competitive journalism to jockey for the inside track with officials, it would have been professional suicide to make an issue of the famine at this particular time. There was much bargaining in a spirit of gentlemanly give-and-take, under the effulgence of Umansky's gilded smile, before a formula of denial was worked out.

We admitted enough to soothe our consciences, but in round-about phrases that damned Jones as a liar. The filthy business having been disposed of, someone ordered vodka and *zakuski*, Umansky joined in the celebration, and the party did not break up until the early morning hours.¹⁷

When Jones replied to his most energetic attacker, Walter Duranty of the *New York Times*, he rightly took to task those journalists whom "the censorship has turned . . . into masters of euphemism and understatement." They gave "famine the polite name of 'food shortage' and 'starving to death' is softened down to read as 'widespread mortality from diseases due to malnutrition,'" ¹⁸ This use of euphemism and of "softening down" the truth allowed the journalists to compromise without losing self-respect, for they could always tell themselves that they had told all they could have and still con-

17. *Ibid.*, 575–576.

18. Gareth Jones, "Mr. Jones Replies," *New York Times*, May 13, 1933, 12.

tinue to report from the country to which they were accredited. Besides, the journalist could tell himself, the astute reader could read between the lines. Isn't that what Western journalists themselves did in order to penetrate the codes of official Soviet press? Perhaps some of them became so used to reading between the lines that they forgot that their readers had not necessarily acquired the same skill.

OUTRIGHT DENIAL

Despite mounting and increasingly irrefutable evidence that famine was raging in Ukraine, two American correspondents in Moscow, Walter Duranty of the *New York Times* and Louis Fischer of the *Nation*, took the lead in publicly denying its existence.

Duranty, the most famous correspondent of his day and the dean of the American press corps in Moscow, won a Pulitzer Prize in 1932 for "dispatches . . . marked by scholarship, profundity, impartiality, sound judgement and exceptional clarity . . . excellent examples of the best type of foreign correspondence."¹⁹ When read with the benefit of hindsight, his stories are a wonderful example of pseudo-objectivity—of explaining things the way his readers wanted to believe they were rather than as they really were. In the words of James Crowl, "What is so remarkable about Duranty's selection for the Pulitzer is that, for a decade, his reports had been slanted and distorted in a way that made a mockery of the award citation. Probably without parallel in the history of these prestigious prizes, the 1932 award went to a man whose reports concealed or disguised the conditions they claimed to reveal, and who may even have been paid by the Soviets for his deceptions."²⁰

The charge that Duranty was on Stalin's payroll has never been—

19. Quoted in James William Crowl, *Angels in Stalin's Paradise: Western Reporters in Soviet Russia, 1917 to 1937: A Case Study of Louis Fischer and Walter Duranty* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982), 143.

20. Ibid. A second major study of Duranty reaching basically the same conclusion is S. J. Taylor, *Stalin's Apologist: Walter Duranty, the New York Times's Man in Moscow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Unfortunately it was received too late to be used adequately in this chapter.

and probably never will be—proved. What we can prove is that—whether compensated in cash or in some other way—he was virtually a public relations man for Stalin. In 1931, on one of his trips outside the Soviet Union, Duranty had a conversation with A. W. Kliefoth of the American embassy in Berlin. The memorandum of this conversation, now declassified, states, "Duranty pointed out that, 'in agreement with the *New York Times* and the Soviet authorities,' his official dispatches always reflect the official opinion of the Soviet regime and not his own."²¹ Given Duranty's record of mendacity, this is slim evidence on which to convict the *Times* for anything more than gullibility and incompetence. But it is as good as a signed confession for Duranty.

In 1932, as the situation in Ukraine and the North Caucasus went from bad to worse, Duranty's attitude initially vacillated. At first he viewed the developing crisis in foodstuffs with considerable alarm, hoping that Stalin would offer further concessions to complement those made during the first half of 1932—a modest reduction in grain quotas and a promise that peasants would ultimately be able to keep something and sell it after meeting state procurements.

In late fall, however, it became clear that there would be no further concessions, and Duranty began to minimize and explain away difficulties as "growing pains," the results of peasant lethargy in some districts and the "marked fall in the living standards of a large number of peasants." By mid-November he stressed that there was "neither famine nor hunger." Although there were "embarrassing" problems, they were not "disastrous." Two days later he wrote that though there might be "an element of truth" in reports of a food shortage, the problem was "not alarming much less desperate." He suggested that Soviets might not eat as well as in the past, but "there is no famine or actual starvation, nor is there likely to be." "The food shortage," Duranty took pains to explain on November 26, "must be regarded as a result of peasant resistance to rural socialization."

21. A. W. Kliefoth, U.S. Embassy, Berlin, "Memorandum, June 4, 1931," 2; 861.5017-Living Conditions/268; T1249; Records of the Department of State; National Archives, Washington D.C.

The situation would not have been serious if world food prices had not fallen, "which forced the Soviet Union to increase the expropriation of foodstuffs at a time when the shoe was beginning to pinch and the distribution of the food at home would have corrected many difficulties." Still, he concluded, "it is a mistake to exaggerate the gravity of the situation. The Russians have tightened their belts before to a far greater extent than is likely to be needed this winter." Even the *New York Times* editorialized on November 30 that collectivization was nothing but "a ghastly failure." As if in reply, Duranty reported that the Soviets could always release stockpiled grain if the problem became more acute.²²

Next to Duranty, the American reporter most consistently willing to gloss Soviet reality was Louis Fischer, who had a deep ideological commitment to Soviet communism dating back to 1920.²³ But when he traveled to Ukraine in October and November of 1932 he was alarmed by what he saw. "In the Poltava, Vinnitsa, Podolsk, and Kiev regions, conditions will be hard," he wrote. "I think there is no starvation anywhere in Ukraine now—after all, they have just gathered in the harvest—but it was a bad harvest."²⁴ Initially critical of the Soviet grain procurement program because it created the food problem, Fischer by February had adopted the official Stalinist view, blaming the problem on Ukrainian counterrevolutionary nationalist "wreckers." It seemed that "whole villages" had been contaminated by such men, who had to be deported to "lumbering camps and mining areas in distant agricultural areas which are now just entering upon their pioneering stage." These steps were forced upon the Kremlin, Fischer wrote, but the Soviets were, nevertheless, learning how to rule wisely.²⁵

Fischer was on a lecture tour in America when Gareth Jones's famine story broke. Asked about the million who had died since

22. J. W. Crowl, *Angels in Stalin's Paradise*, 150–152, 159.

23. *Ibid.*, 22–25 and *passim*.

24. Louis Fischer, "Soviet Progress and Poverty," *Nation*, December 7, 1932, 553. Cited in Crowl, *Angels in Stalin's Paradise*, 153.

25. *Idem.*, "Soviet Deportations," *Nation*, February 22, 1933, 39.

1930 in Kazakhstan, he scoffed, "Who counted them? How could anyone march through a country and count a million people? Of course people are hungry there—desperately hungry. Russia is turning over from agriculture to industrialism. It's like a man going into business on small capital."²⁶ Speaking to a college audience in Oakland, California, a week later, Fischer stated emphatically, "There is no starvation in Russia."²⁷

The Jones story also caught Duranty by surprise. He claimed that Jones had concocted a "big scare story" based on a "hasty" and "inadequate" glimpse of the countryside consisting of a forty-mile walk through villages around Kharkiv. He went on to claim that he himself had made a thorough investigation and discovered no famine, although he did admit that the food shortage had become acute in Ukraine, the North Caucasus, and the Lower Volga Basin. This he attributed to mismanagement and recently executed "conspirators" in the Commissariat of Agriculture. Still, he wrote, "there is no actual starvation, but there is widespread mortality from diseases due to malnutrition." And the hardship was worth it: "To put it brutally, you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs."²⁸

Only in August 1933, in the course of a story denouncing "exaggerated" émigré claims, did Duranty admit that "in some districts and among the large floating population of unskilled labor" there were "deaths and actual starvation."²⁹ Later that month, he reported that though the "excellent harvest" of 1933 had made any report of famine either "an exaggeration or malignant propaganda," there had been a "food shortage" that had caused a "heavy loss of life" in Ukraine, the North Caucasus, and Lower Volga Basin.³⁰ In September, Dur-

26. "New Deal' Needed for Entire World, Says Visiting Author," *Denver Post*, April 1, 1933, 3. Cited in Crowl, *Angels in Stalin's Paradise*, 157.

27. "Too Much Freedom Given to Russia's Women, Says Writer," *San Francisco News*, April 11, 1933, 2. Cited in Crowl, *Angels in Stalin's Paradise*, 157.

28. Walter Duranty, "Russians Hungry But Not Starving," *New York Times*, March 31, 1933, 13.

29. Walter Duranty, "Russian Emigres Push Fight on Reds," *New York Times*, August 13, 1933, 2.

30. Walter Duranty, "Famine Toll Heavy in Southern Russia," *New York Times*, August 24, 1933, 1.

anty was the first Western reporter allowed to go to Ukraine and the North Caucasus after the imposition of the ban on travel there by journalists. William Stoneman of the *Chicago Daily News* had managed to find a way to get to Ukraine without permission and had filed an accurate account, leading the Soviets to send their most favored journalist to sweeten the pill.³¹ Now able to report truthfully a good harvest, Duranty also belatedly reported what he had known all along: "Hard conditions had decimated the peasantry. Some had fled. There were Ukrainian peasants begging in the streets of Moscow last winter, and other Ukrainians were seeking work or food, but principally food, from Rostov on Don to White Russia and from the Lower Volga to Samara."³² In short, he admitted the truth only after others had done so more explicitly and always in a context designed to show his readers that things were not nearly so bad as other sources might indicate.

He was more explicit in private. In December 1932, he told an American diplomat in Paris that he was deeply pessimistic because of "the growing seriousness of the food shortage."³³ In September 1933, after returning from Ukraine and the North Caucasus, he talked with a British diplomat who reported to London, "Mr. Duranty thinks it quite possible that as many as 10 million people may have died directly or indirectly from lack of food in the Soviet Union during the past year."³⁴

Eugene Lyons also recalled that at dinner with Duranty, he gave us his fresh impressions in brutally frank terms and they added up to a picture of ghastly horror. His estimate of the dead from famine was the most startling I had as yet heard from anyone.

31. Joseph Alsop, *FDR, 1882-1945: A Centenary Remembrance* (New York: Viking, 1982), 249.

32. Walter Duranty, "Big Soviet Crop Follows Famine," *New York Times*, September 16, 1933.

33. U.S. Embassy, Paris, "Memorandum of Remark Made by Mr. Walter Duranty," December 8, 1932, 2; 861.5017-Living Conditions/752; T1249; Records of the Department of State; National Archives.

34. William Strang, British Embassy, Moscow, to Sir John Simon, September 30, 1933, republished in Marco Carynnyk, Lubomyr Luciuk, and Bohdan Kordan, eds., *The Foreign Office and the Famine: British Documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-1933* (Kingston, Ontario: Limestone Press, 1988), 313.

"But, Walter, you don't mean that literally?" Mrs. McCormick exclaimed.

"Hell I don't. . . I'm being conservative," he replied, and as if by way of consolation he added his famous truism: "But they're only Russians . . ."

Once more that same evening we heard Duranty make the same estimate. . . . When the issues of the *Times* carrying Duranty's own articles reached me I found that they failed to mention the large figures he had given freely and repeatedly to all of us.³⁵

Muggeridge also provided a telling vignette of Duranty in 1933: "He'd been asked to write something about the food shortage, and was trying to put together a thousand words which, if the famine got worse and known outside Russia, would suggest that he'd foreseen and foretold it, but which, if it got better and wasn't known outside Russia, would suggest that he'd pooh-poohed the possibility of there being a famine. He was a little gymnast. . . . He trod his tightrope daintily and charmingly."³⁶ Half a century later Muggeridge put it less elegantly: "Duranty was the villain of the whole thing. . . . It is difficult for me to see how it could have been otherwise that in some sense he was not in the regime's power. He wrote things about the famine and the situation in Ukraine which were laughably wrong. There is no doubt whatever that the authorities could manipulate him."³⁷

Duranty admitted, then denied, the famine to John Chamberlain, book critic for the *New York Times*. Chamberlain wrote in his autobiography:

To a group in the *Times* elevator Duranty had almost casually mentioned that three million people had died in Russia in what amounted to a man-made famine. Duranty, who had floated the theory that revolutions were beyond moral judgement ("You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs."), did not condemn Stalin for the bloody elimination of the kulaks that had deprived the Russian countryside of necessary sustaining expertise. He just simply let the three-million figure go at that.

What struck me at the time was the double iniquity of Duranty's perfor-

35. Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia*, 580.

36. Malcolm Muggeridge, *Winter in Moscow* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1934), 162.

37. Interview with Bohdan Nahaylo, Robertsbridge, England, March 1, 1983.

mance. He was not only heartless about the famine, he had betrayed his calling as a journalist by failing to report it.³⁸

On the basis of Duranty's remark, Chamberlain, hitherto a communist sympathizer, decided to review a book entitled *Escape from the Soviets*. Written by Tatiana Tchernavina, who had escaped via Finland, the book had earlier been rejected because it presented the Soviet Union in too negative a light. When Chamberlain, in his review, mentioned peasants starving, he was immediately attacked by the American communists and their sympathizers. Chamberlain recalled that then "Duranty, with his visa hanging fire, denied ever having said anything." With losing his job a distinct possibility, Chamberlain was saved by fellow book reviewer Simeon Strunsky, who testified that he had heard Duranty say the same thing.³⁹

Meanwhile, Louis Fischer continued to deny the famine's existence and to extol the virtues of Soviet life. "The first half of 1933 was very difficult indeed," he admitted in August 1933. "Many people simply did not have sufficient nourishment. The 1932 harvest was bad, and to make matters worse, thousands of tons of grain rotted in the fields because the peasants refused to reap what they knew the government would confiscate under the guise of 'collection.'" ⁴⁰ But Fischer, straining to justify the Soviet government, wrote in January 1934 that "during all those hard years . . . the state endeavored to beautify life. . . . The opera, the ballet, and many theaters displayed a dazzling richness of scene and costume incomparably greater than elsewhere in the world. Parks of culture and rest were established throughout the country to provide sensible recreation and civilized leisure." Fischer also adopted a line often used to justify evil: "All governments are based on force. The question is only of the degree of force, who administers it, and for what purpose. . . . Force which eliminates oppressors and exploiters, creates

38. John Chamberlain, *A Life with the Printed Word* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1982), 54-55.

39. *Ibid.*, 55.

40. Louis Fischer, "Russia's Last Hard Year," *Nation*, August 9, 1933, 154-155.

work and prosperity, and guarantees progress and economic security will not be resented by the great masses of people."⁴¹

William Randolph Hearst made a final attempt to use the famine to attack President Franklin D. Roosevelt. His newspaper chain ran a series of articles on the famine in 1935, in the style for which the term *yellow journalism* was coined. Written by Thomas Walker, the articles may have been a reworking of authentic material from 1933 that Hearst either bought or borrowed. Undoubtedly at Hearst's behest, Walker "updated" the story by placing the famine in 1934 rather than 1932-1933.⁴² Fischer, who had been to Ukraine in 1934 and, of course, saw no famine, accused Walker of "inventing" a famine. He interpreted the whole affair as an attempt by Hearst to "spoil Soviet-American relations" as part of "an anti-red campaign."⁴³

Fischer was challenged by W. H. Chamberlain, who wrote from Tokyo, chiding Fischer for his failure to mention that 1932-1933 had seen "one of the worst famines in history":

I feel justified in recalling my personal observations of this famine because, although it happened two years ago, I think it will probably still be "news" to readers of *The Nation* who depend on Mr. Fischer for their knowledge of Russian developments. I have searched brilliant articles on other phases of Soviet life for a single, forthright, unequivocal recognition of the famine although he was in Russia during the period of the famine and was scarcely ignorant of something that was common knowledge of Russians and foreigners in the country at the time.

Fischer responded that he had not been in the Soviet Union during the famine, that he had mentioned it in his book, *Soviet Journey*, but that he, unlike Chamberlain, did not put all the blame on the Soviet government.⁴⁴ In *Soviet Journey* he wrote: "History can be cruel. . . .

41. Louis Fischer, "Luxury in the U.S.S.R.," *Nation*, January 31, 1934, 120-121.

42. Serialized in five installments in the *New York Evening Journal*, February 19-27, 1935. See also *Chicago American*, March 1-6, 1935.

43. Louis Fischer, "Hearst's Russian 'Famine,'" *Nation*, March 13, 1935, 296-297.

44. *Nation*, May 29, 1935, 629.

The peasants wanted to destroy collectivization. The peasants used the best means at their disposal. The government used the best means at their disposal. The government won."⁴⁵

Hearst, with Walker exposed as someone who had never gone near Ukraine, began in 1935 to publish true accounts that had been available for some time, but lacked some of Walker's journalistic aplomb. Harry Lang, who had earlier published an account of his 1933 journey to Ukraine in the *Jewish Daily Forward*, wrote a series that reported his being told by a Soviet official that 6 million had perished.⁴⁶ Richard Sanger, later a distinguished U.S. diplomat, had gone with his wife to the Soviet Union in 1933 and gave the figure of 4.5 million.⁴⁷

Perhaps the most interesting of these accounts was that of Adam Tawdul, a Ukrainian-American whose family had known Ukrainian Communist strongman Mykola Skrypnyk in the Bolshevik underground before coming to the United States in 1913. Tawdul returned to Ukraine in 1931 and, thanks to this acquaintance, was able to move in high circles. Tawdul claimed that before Skrypnyk committed suicide in July 1933 he told him that 8 to 9 million had perished of starvation in Ukraine and the Caucasus, and that another official had told him an additional million or two had died in the Ural region, the Volga basin, and in western Siberia.⁴⁸

As for those who denied outright the existence of the famine: Fischer, who broke with the Soviets following the Spanish civil war, later admitted that the Ukrainian famine had cost the lives of millions.⁴⁹ Looking back, he recalled that even then, "my own attitude

45. Cited by Eugene Lyons, *The Red Decade: The Stalinist Penetration of America* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1941), 118.

46. *New York Evening Journal*, April 15-23, 1935. Lang's original account was published in the *Jewish Daily Forward* (Yiddish), December 27, 1933.

47. *New York Evening Journal*, April 29-March 9, 1935; on his subsequent career, see his obituary, *Washington Post*, March 30, 1979.

48. Adam J. Tawdul, "10,000,000 Starved in Russia in Two Years, Soviet Admits," *New York American*, August 18, 1935, 1-2; Adam J. Tawdul, "Russia Warred on Own People," *New York American*, August 19, 1935, 2. The Tawdul series continued until August 31.

49. In Richard Crossman, ed., *The God That Failed* (New York: Bantam, 1959), 188.

began to bother me. Was I not glorifying steel and kilowatts and forgetting the human being? All the shoes, schools, books, tractors, electric light, and subways in the world would not add up to the world of my dreams if the system that produced them was immoral and inhuman."⁵⁰

Duranty, never an idealist like Fischer, could not be disillusioned because he had no illusions in the first place. In later years, when Sovietophilism had gone out of fashion, Duranty lied about ever having lied in the first place. In his last book, published in 1949, he wrote, "Whatever Stalin's apologists might say, 1932 was a year of famine," and he claimed that he had said so at the time.⁵¹ As we have seen, he had, but not in his dispatches to the *New York Times*.

PERCEPTUAL BIAS

Leaders of "enlightened" public opinion in this country tended to believe the official Duranty, debunker of scare stories, rather than those whose veracity his private conversations confirmed. For example, writing in the *New Republic*, Joshua Kunitz, quoting Stalin almost verbatim, put the blame not on collectivization but on "the lack of revolutionary vigilance" against "kulaks" who had not yet been liquidated and the "selfishness, dishonesty, laziness, and irresponsibility" of the peasants.⁵²

There can be little doubt that American journalists collaborated with the Soviets in covering up the famine. Duranty, who privately admitted his role as a semiofficial Soviet spokesman as early as 1931 and who after the famine told British diplomats that as many as 10

50. *Ibid.*, 189.

51. Walter Duranty, *Stalin and Co.: The Politburo—The Men Who Run Russia* (New York: Sloane, 1949), 78.

52. *New Republic*, May 10, 1933, 360. Compare with Stalin's January 11, 1933, joint plenum speech, in which he blamed the difficulties in carrying out the procurements on two things: kulaks who had managed to enter the collective farms and were undermining them from within, and the alleged laxity of party officials who were allowing the collective farmers to set up "all kinds of reserves," who had not realized that the collective farmer was still at heart a petty bourgeois and that the collective farms themselves were full of hidden class enemies. I. V. Stalin, *Sochineniia* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1946-1952), 13:216-233.

million might have perished, seems to have played an especially crucial role in America's extension of diplomatic recognition to the Soviet government in November 1933. It was with Duranty that FDR, even as a candidate, first publicly broached the issue of recognition.⁵³ Duranty seems to have been determined that American public opinion not be negatively influenced on the eve of Roosevelt's negotiations with the Soviets. He thought it imperative that the United States and the USSR establish diplomatic relations, and the famine, especially if it was the result of Stalin's malevolence, was a stumbling block that had to be removed. His influence on Roosevelt's perception of the Soviet Union was profound. As Joseph Alsop wrote:

The authority on Soviet affairs was universally held to be the New York Times correspondent in Moscow, Walter Duranty. . . . The nature of his reporting can be gauged by what happened in the case of the dire Stalin-induced famine in the Ukraine in the early 1930s. . . . The Duranty cover-up, for that was what it was, also continued thereafter; and no one of consequence told the terrible truth.

This being the climate in the United States, Roosevelt and [Harry] Hopkins would have had to be very different men to make boldly informed judgements of the Soviet system and Stalin's doings and purposes in defiance of almost everyone else who was then thought to be enlightened.⁵⁴

Yet Duranty was only an opportunist who took advantage of something far more pervasive, a climate of opinion that made telling the truth about Stalinism almost an offense against good taste in "enlightened" circles. Eugene Lyons, who initially went to the Soviet Union with every intention of defending it, described the ambivalence felt by most Western observers of the day:

53. Already in July 1932, soon after winning the nomination, FDR had lunch with Duranty, indicating that he was "contemplating, in the event of being elected, a new policy toward the Soviets." His stand was not clear, but "the Governor's international advisers feel that the United States could profit by adopting an attitude different from that taken by the Republican administrations of the last decade. . . . The Governor for some time has manifested deep interest in the Soviet's experiment and today he spent several hours asking Walter Duranty . . . about his many years of experience in Russia. 'I turned the tables,' said the Governor. 'I asked all the questions this time. It was fascinating.'" *New York Times*, July 26, 1932.

54. Alsop, *FDR, 1882-1945: A Centenary Remembrance*, 249.

I returned to the United States in April, 1934. More sharply than ever before I faced the dilemma: to tell or not to tell.

By 1934 exaggerated faith in the Soviet experiment had become the intellectual fashion among the people for whose good opinion I cared most. It was clear to me what sort of account of Russia the intellectual elite preferred to hear.

The editors of a liberal weekly invited me to a staff luncheon. It would have been the polite and kindly thing to bolster up their eager misconceptions. I was given an opening to denounce books about Russia that had told too much. News had just come through that the G.P.U. had been converted into a Commissariat for Internal Affairs. By stretching my conscience, I might have assured them that a new era of liberalism had dawned under the Soviets. But the Ukrainian famine, the valuta horrors, the death decrees and heresy hunts still smarted in my memory. I alluded to a few of these things. A chill seemed to come over the luncheon; apparently I had committed the offense of puncturing noble illusions. The Olympian irony of the situation—I could not help thinking of it—was that these men, their exact kind, were being stamped out in the Soviet land like so many insects. They fitted perfectly into the category of prerevolutionary intellectuals, who must hide in the dark cracks, praying for only one boon—not to be noticed.

Other intellectuals were no less frightened of the truth. They asked questions about Russia and appeared horrified if I failed to give the prescribed answers. Indeed, it seemed to me that these men and women, insulted to the marrow by the iniquities of bourgeois society, were wiping out the insult Japanese fashion by committing intellectual hara-kiri. . . .

The desire to "belong," not to be a political dog in the manger, was a powerful inducement to silence, or at least to cautious understatement.⁵⁵

Today even the perpetrator government recognizes the historicity of the famine of 1933, and in February 1990 the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine published a special statement, admitting that the famine was artificially brought about by Stalin and his close associates.⁵⁶ But the 1930s was a "Red Decade" for

55. Eugene Lyons, "To Tell or Not to Tell," *Harper's*, June 1935; reprinted in *American Views of Soviet Russia, 1917-1965*, ed. Peter G. Filene (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1968), 107-108.

56. "Povidomlennia TsK KPU," *Radians'ka Ukraina*, February 7, 1990, 4. The

many "enlightened" Americans, immunized to unpleasant truths about Stalin and the system he was creating by the attractiveness of socialist ideals. Their vaccination was part fear of disillusionment and part fear of being cast in with the ignorant rabble who read the Hearst press rather than the *New York Times*. And so enlightened Americans all the way up to the president either refused to believe or turned a blind eye to the famine as they would later to the terror of 1937–1938. Perceptual selectivity based on political conviction, the confusion of fact and principle such that facts are rejected when inconvenient to one's political ideals, is as much with us now as it was then. When will we recognize that truly massive destruction is always accompanied by fervently held political ideals? After all, the Young Turks did it for the salvation of the Ottoman Empire, the Nazis for a new Germany and purified Aryan race, the Stalinists for a world without classes or exploitation. Ideals are no less fervently held for being wrong or perverted. But the dead are also no less dead.

Central Committee's statement has in turn made possible for the first time in the USSR the publication of serious historical work and previously unpublished archival documents, most notably the collection recently published by the former Ukrainian Institute of Party History. *Holod 1932–1933 rr.: Ochyma istoriykin, movoiu dokumentiv* (Politydav Ukraina: Kiev, 1990).

Part Three

**APPROACHES TO PREVENTION
AND PUNISHMENT**