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The Great Ukrainian Famine of 1932-33

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Over four million people starved to death between the fall of 1932 and the summer of 1933 in Ukraine and the Kuban, an administrative unit of the Russian Republic in the northern Caucasus populated largely by Ukrainians. Up until Gorbachev s *perestroika*, this tragedy was never spoken of in the USSR. The 1932-33 famine was officially recognized in Ukraine only in December 1987 during a speech given by Shcherbytskyi, the First Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party, on the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the Ukrainian Republic. Since then, the opening up of once inaccessible archives has brought to light a number of documents that have made it possible to analyze and better understand the political mechanisms behind the genesis and aggravation of the famine in Ukraine and Kuban, and the role of the Soviet leadership in this process. These sources include secret resolutions passed by the Politburo or the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party, Stalin s correspondence with his closest collaborators Molotov and Kaganovich, and secret police reports on the situation in the countryside, in particular at the collection fronts . The documents also help to delineate the particular characteristics of the Ukrainian famine vis-à-vis other famines that ravished a slew of regions in the USSR in 1931-33, including Kazakhstan, where between 1.1-1.4 million died (or almost one third of the indigenous Kazakh population), and western Siberia and the Volga area, with several hundred thousand victims (Abylhozin, Aldazumanov and Kozybaev, 1992; Ohayon, 2006; Malyseva and Poznanskii, 1999; Ivnitskii, 2000).

Any discussion of the contributions of recent studies on the Ukrainian famine must acknowledge the pioneering works that first sought to pierce the deafening silence surrounding this taboo event. Among these, one cannot overstate the major role played by Robert Conquest s *The Harvest of Sorrow* (1986), which underlined the link between the famine and the national question, a key issue that the American historian Terry Martin has recently subject to deeper analysis on the basis of new materials in his book *The Affirmative Action Empire* (2001). James Mace also produced several important works before the opening up of the Soviet archives, including *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation* (1983), while the Ukrainian Association of the Victims of the Communist Terror published testimonies by famine victims in *The Black Deeds of the Kremlin* (1955). Information and insights provided by more recent studies incorporating newly accessible archival sources allow us to reconstruct the processes behind the political decisions taken, the sequence of events, and the responsibility borne by the Soviet leaders who drove the 1932-33 famine in Ukraine. The more important of these latter include works and compilations of various types of documents " correspondence, resolutions, directives, decrees, speeches, etc& " by V. P. Danilov, N. A. Ivnitskii, S.V. Kulchytskyi, and I. Shapoval and V. Vasilev, A. Graziosi, and R. W. Davies and S. G. Wheatcroft, among others (see bibliography).

The Mechanisms of a Murderous Famine: Prologue (First Half of 1932)

In 1931, Soviet state collection agencies managed to extract a record quantity of grain (almost twenty-three million tons) from a very mediocre national harvest (sixty-nine million tons), five million of which was exported. Owing to poor harvests in western Siberia and Kazakhstan, the three most important grain-producing centers of the country, i.e. Ukraine, the northern Caucasus and the central black earth region, were targeted for particularly heavy contributions that year. Thus in 1931, more than 42 percent of Ukraine s total harvest was taken, an exceptionally large levy that would disrupt a production cycle already seriously shaken by the forced collectivization and de-kulakization begun the year before. Many kolkhozes were forced to give up some of the seed required for the following year s crop, seriously undermining future yields. Beginning in February-March 1932, reports by the Secret Political Department of the OGPU sent to the chief Soviet leaders mentioned isolated sites of food problems . These reports were confirmed by Kosior, the First Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party, in a letter to Stalin on April 26, 1932. According to Kosior, these isolated cases of starving villages were the result of excesses and deviations by local officials who had gone a little too far in the last collection campaign& . He added, One must

categorically reject all talk of a supposed famine in Ukraine (Kulchytskyi, 1990: 147-148).

In the course of the following weeks, which coincided with the traditional gap between two harvests, the food shortage deteriorated to such an extent that Petrovskyi, the President of the Executive Committee of Ukrainian Soviets, and Chubar, the head of the Ukrainian government, decided to each address a long letter to Stalin and Molotov on June 10, 1932. Both letters described the now critical situation in the Ukrainian countryside: At least 100 districts (as opposed to sixty-one in May) need emergency food assistance, wrote Chubar, adding, I visited many villages and I saw people starving everywhere & Women were crying, even the men sometimes . Criticism was pointed: Why have you created this artificial famine? We had a harvest, why did you confiscate it all? Even under the old regime, no one would have done this! [1] Like Petrovskyi, Chubar blamed the situation on excesses and the giddiness of success among local officials, remaining silent on the fact that these officials were simply obeying specific orders to fulfill the plan at all costs. Both warned of danger ahead: If the *muzhik* was too weak to work, the 1932 harvest would be catastrophic. Chubar asked for emergency assistance, albeit modest, of one million poods (16 000 tons) of grain. Petrovskyi boldly requested a little more, one and a half million poods (24-32 000 tons) (Shapoval and Vasilev, 2001: 206-215).

These requests met with no response. Addressing an assembly of top Party officials on June 12, 1932, Molotov, the head of the Soviet government, declared: Even if we are confronted today with the specter of famine, mostly in the grain-producing zones, the collection plans must be fulfilled at all costs (Ivnitskii, 1996b). A week later, on 18 June, Stalin shared his opinion with Kaganovich. In Stalin s view, the situation in Ukraine was the product of a mechanistic approach to the last collection plan... The real situation of each kolkhoz had not been considered [2]. He explained that it was out of the question, however, to ease the 1932 plan. On June 21, Stalin and Molotov sent a very firm telegram to the leadership of the Ukrainian Communist Party, reminding it that no decrease in deliveries owed by the kolkhozes and the sovkhozes will be tolerated and no extension of the deadline is granted (Shapoval and Vasilev, 2001: 93).

The Mechanisms of a Murderous Famine: The Second Phase (July-October 1932)

At the Third Conference of the Ukrainian Party, which assembled in Kharkiv between 6-10 July, the vast majority of speakers (secretaries of district or regional committees) deemed Moscow s collection plan unachievable . Nevertheless, the delegates ratified the 1932 plan, under pressure from Molotov and Kaganovich, who had been rushed to Kharkiv for the occasion. The two intervened brutally in the debates, not hesitating to declare that any attempt to ease the plan is fundamentally anti-Party and anti-Bolshevik . Ukraine was required to provide 356 million poods of grain, or about six million tons (Shapoval and Vasilev, 2001: 152-178). However, in July 1932, the first month of the new levy , grain is not coming in , and at the end of July, barely 48 000 tons were delivered, or seven times less than the year before (Shapoval and Vasilev, 2001: 98)! The opposition demonstrated by the Ukrainian chiefs did not, of course, go unnoticed by Stalin, as his recently published correspondence with Kaganovich shows: On 11 August, Stalin sent Kaganovich a long letter that helps to illuminate the history of the Ukrainian famine. According to Stalin:

> The most important thing now is Ukraine. The current situation in Ukraine is terribly bad. It s bad in the Party. They say that, in two regions in Ukraine (Kiev and Dnieprepetrovsk), some fifty district committees have spoken against the collection plan, declaring it unrealistic. Things are no better in the other district committees. What does it sound like? It s no longer a party, it s a parliament, a caricature of a parliament. Instead of leading, Kosior has been maneuvering between the directives of the Party Central Committee and the requests of the district committees: Now he s squeezed into a corner. Things are bad with the soviets.

> Chubar is not a leader. The situation with the GPU is not good. Redens is not up to leading the struggle against the counter-revolution in a republic as large and particular as Ukraine. If we do not immediately take charge of straightening out the situation in Ukraine, we could lose Ukraine. Bear in mind that Pilsudski never rests, his espionage capabilities in Ukraine are much stronger than Redens and Kosior realize. And remember too that, in the Ukrainian Communist Party (500 000 members, ha ha !), we find no few (no, no few!) rotten types, conscious and unconscious petliurites , as well as direct agents of Pilsudski. As soon as things get worse, these elements will lose no time in opening up a front within (and outside) the Party, against the Party. The worst of it is that the Ukrainian leaders are oblivious to these dangers (Khlevniuk, 2001: 273-274).

Continuing, Stalin proposed that Kaganovich take charge of the Ukrainian Party, that Balitskyi replace Redens at the head of the GPU and Chubar be dismissed. The letter ended with: Ukraine must be transformed as soon as possible into a true fortress of the USSR, into a truly exemplary republic. Spare no effort. Without these measures (economic and political reinforcement of Ukraine, firstly in the border districts, etc&), we risk losing Ukraine (Khlevniuk, 2001: 273-274).

For Stalin, Ukraine was vulnerable, but not because of the imminent famine that threatened to kill millions of Ukrainians. It was vulnerable politically, the weak link in the system. Stalin had not forgotten that, two years earlier, the Soviet regime had lost control for several weeks of some 100 border districts along the Polish frontier, following the greatest wave of consecutive peasant uprisings against forced collectivization; that Ukraine alone had been the site of almost half of the some 6 500 peasant riots and disturbances reported by the OGPU in the course of the single month of March 1930; that the peasant insurgents had demonstrated under explicit banners proclaiming *Vse ne vmerla Ukraina ! (Ukraine still lives!)*. The situation had to be reined in, through the submission of the Ukrainian peasantry to the demands of the global development of the USSR. In the immediate term, that meant the fulfillment, within set deadlines, of the First Five Year Plan, which depended largely on a program of agricultural exports. Commenting on the situation, Kirov, one of Stalin s closet corroborators, observed that, in this context, the annual collection campaign was the touchstone of our strength or our weakness, of the strength or weakness of our enemies . [3]

On the collection front, September and October 1932 were catastrophic. In September, only 32 percent of the monthly target was reached in Ukraine and 28 percent in the northern Caucasus. In October, deliveries shrank again: On October 25, only 22 percent of the mandatory levy fixed for that month was collected in Ukraine, and 18 percent in the northern Caucasus (Shapoval and Vasilev, 2001: 104). The confidential reports of the Secret Political Department of the OGPU throw light on the various strategies employed by the peasants, often in complicity with the kolkhoz administration, to withhold some of the harvest from the state: grain, barely harvested, buried in pits , hidden in black granaries (secret storage sites scattered around village lines), ground the traditional way in hand mills , overturned on the way to silos or at weighing points; children, women and the elderly " whom the peasants thought might enjoy some lenience before the law " sent, often by cover of darkness, to cut down some stalks (they were referred to in the countryside, with some derision, as the barbers). It was these acts of resistance, this kulak sabotage that the Politburo set out to break, when it decided, on October 22, to send out two plenipotentiary commissions to Ukraine and the northern Caucasus " one headed by Molotov, the other by Kaganovich.

The Mechanisms of a Murderous Famine: The Third Phase (November 1932-January 1933)

During the course of three decisive months (end of October 1932-end of January 1933), these commissions, involving the highest-level chiefs of the OGPU (notably Iagoda, the head of the Soviet secret police),

played a critical role in aggravating the famine. Crucial documents, now de-classified, vividly elucidate the political and ideological arguments advanced by Stalin s envoys, the escalation of repressive measures, and the increasingly resolute use of hunger as a weapon to crush the resistance of the Ukrainian peasantry: Telegrams sent to Stalin by his two plenipotentiaries , dispatches exchanged between the chiefs of the Ukrainian Communist Party, speeches given by Molotov and Kaganovich before local assemblies of Party movers as well as before kolkhozes, and the travel journal of Kaganovich " taken together, they paint the picture of the unfolding famine (Shapoval and Vasilev, 2001: 204-367).

Before leaving for Rostov-on-the-Don on October 29, Kaganovich presented a resolution project to the Politburo outlining the goals of his mission to the northern Caucasus. Notable among these was the intensification of the levies, i.e. to take all measures to break the sabotage of the collections and of the sowing campaign by kulak counter-revolutionary elements . [4] Upon arriving in Rostov on 1 November, Kaganovich announced to the local regional Party chiefs that it is useless to try and give me a precise account of grain reserves. This can only lead to all sorts of deceit and amounts essentially to a rejection of the collection plan. The problem can only be resolved by crushing the kulak counter-revolutionary elements . [5] On November 5, Kaganovich wrote to Stalin from Krasnodar:

> The counter-revolutionaries are strongly entrenched. The dreadful work of the local Party organizations, of liberalism, opportunism and sloppiness have paved the way for the rise of the counter-revolution... Our main task today is to break sabotage, sabotage that is organized and led by a single center. I m leaving Krasnodar today for the *stanitsy* (Cossack towns). I ll head to the most rebellious, Poltavskaia, which is home to no fewer than 400 teachers, doctors, technicians, Cossack officers, etc... [6]

The missions of Kaganovich and Molotov (the latter expressing much of the same upon his arrival in Kharkiv and during the course of his expedition in the Odessa and Dnipropetrovsk regions) resembled veritable military campaigns against insurgents. Hundreds of detachments consisting on activists and plenipotentiaries with vague mandates, supported by agents of the OGPU, were sent into the countryside to take the grain .

Among the first measures taken by Molotov and Kaganovich was to halt the supply of all manufactured products to those districts that had not fulfilled the plan. The most rebellious towns were placed on the blackboard , signifying the removal of all products, both manufactured goods *and food*, from stores, a complete stoppage in trade, immediate repayment of all active credits (individual and collective), a special levy (i.e. basically the total confiscation of the peasants last remaining food reserves), and massive arrests of all the saboteurs of the collection plan . The number of arrests in Ukraine and the northern Caucasus skyrocketed: 20 000 in November for leading the sabotage of collections and more than 30 000 for the theft of social property (punishable, under a new law promulgated on August 7, 1932, by ten years in a prison camp or even death). In December, 72 000 were arrested in total (Shapoval and Vasilev, 2001: 125). [7] During the search-and-arrest missions carried out by the collection detachments , thousands of grain pits were unearthed. However, as Balitskyi (the new head of the Ukrainian GPU) admitted, the total haul was pathetic " barely 10 000 tons of grain, or 0.2 percent of the collection plan (*Bulletin IHTP*, 2003: 203-205)!

It is clear that the Ukrainian countryside was deprived of its last food reserves during the fall of 1932, the village store shelves stripped bare of their paltry supply of products. The final stage in the escalating repression was the collective deportation of all the inhabitants of rebellious villages that had waged war against Soviet power , as Kaganovich declared to the villagers of Medvedovskaia *stanitsa* on November 6, 1932. A few weeks later, all of the inhabitants of three large *stanitsy* in the Kuban (Medvedovskaia, Oumanskaia and Poltavskaia), totaling more than 45 000 people, were collectively deported to Siberia, the Urals, and Kazakhstan for failing to fulfill the unrealistic collection plan that had been imposed on them (Oskolkov, 1995: 120-121). These coercive measures were also designed to break the final resistance of a

certain number of Ukrainian communist chiefs, compelling them to fully yield on the collective plan at all costs. The correspondence between Molotov and Khataevich, the First Secretary of the Dnipropetrovsk region, sheds some light on this point. In his letter of November 23, 1932, Khataevich tried to explain to Molotov that it would be economically irrational to seize the last reserves held by the kolkhozes: If production is to go up in future to meet the needs of the proletarian state, we must take into account the minimal needs of the kolkhozes and their members, otherwise there will soon be nobody left to plant the crop and harvest it. Molotov s reply the same day is revealing:

> Your position is profoundly incorrect, non-Bolshevik. We Bolsheviks cannot place the needs of the State " minimal needs that have been precisely defined and on numerous occasions by the resolutions of the Party " in tenth or even in second place in order to satisfy the needs of the kolkhozes. A true Bolshevik must place the needs of the State first. [8]

It was in the second half of December 1932 that the fatal measures were taken condemning tens of millions of Ukrainian peasants to starvation. On December 19, the Politburo demanded a radical break in the collection pace . Kaganovich, seconded by tens of upper Party chiefs and by the OGPU, was dispatched again as plenipotentiary to Ukraine, empowered to occupy strategic regions and adopt all measures to fulfill the collection plan before January 15, 1933 . [9] A few days later, in a letter sent to Stalin from Odessa, he proposed the annulment of a resolution passed by the Ukrainian Communist Party stipulating that only the Regional Executive Committee of Soviets could authorize, in special circumstances, the confiscation of kolkhoz seed stores and their inclusion in mandatory state levies. [10] With Stalin s enthusiastic support, Kaganovich imposed this measure on the leadership of the Ukrainian Communist Party on December 29. The local leadership also bowed at this time to another critical tactic: Kolkhozes that failed to fulfill the collection plan would have five days to hand over their so-called seed stores (*tak nazyvaemye semennye fondy*), the last reserves ensuring the next harvest, even the most minimal, or some final assistance to starving kolkhoz members. [11] Three days later, on January 1, 1933, the Ukrainian Communist Party heads adopted a resolution calling for all kolkhoz members and individual peasants caught with hidden stocks to be included among thieves of socialist property and judged with all the severity of the law of August 7, 1932 . The repression had crossed a new threshold.

Between January 7-12, 1933, an important plenum of the Central Committee took place in Moscow, a great annual reunion bringing together Party leaders from around the country. Stalin acknowledged that, despite an overall better harvest in 1932 than the year before, the collection campaign had encountered more difficulties. He blamed these on sabotage perpetrated by kulak infiltrators within the kolkhozes , the criminal nonchalance of the rural communists , their non-marxist attitude towards collective agriculture . [12] Like all the speakers, the leaders of the Ukrainian Communist Party, some of whom had tried to withstand Moscow s pressure, celebrated the triumph of socialism and the spectacular successes of the First Five Year Plan, completed in four years and three months , remaining silent on the real situation in Ukraine.

While the plenum progressed in Moscow, the peasant exodus from the famine zones intensified. For the chiefs of the OGPU, these departures were consciously organized by counter-revolutionary organizations . In one week, our services have stopped 500 hardened instigators who were pushing the peasants to leave, Balitskyi wrote to Iagoda, the head of the OGPU. [13] On January 22, 1933, Stalin himself drafted a key secret directive ordering an immediate halt to the massive peasant exodus from Ukraine and the Kuban on the pretext of searching for bread . Stalin wrote:

> The Central Committee and the Council of People s Commissars have evidence that this exodus from Ukraine, even that of the year before, has been organized by the enemies of Soviet power, the socialist-revolutionaries, and Polish agents. Their goal is propaganda, to use the peasants fleeing towards the regions of the USSR north of Ukraine to discredit the kolkhoz system and, in particular, the Soviet

> system in general. [14]

The same day, Iagoda sent a circular to the regional leaders of the OGPU ordering that special patrols be set up, especially in stations and on the roads, to intercept all the runaways from Ukraine and the northern Caucasus. Once those stopped had been filtered , the kulak and counter-revolutionary elements , the individuals spreading counter-revolutionary rumors on supposed food problems , as well as all those who refused to return home were to be arrested and deported to special villages (or, in the case of the most hardened, sent to camps). The other runaways would be sent back home , i.e. to villages ravaged by famine, and left to fend for themselves without any food assistance at all. This, in effect, was a death sentence. [15]

The following day, on January 23, 1933, Stalin s directive against peasant flight (as well as the spread of news about the famine) was put into motion by the imposition of various restrictions, beginning with a suspension of the sale of train tickets to peasants. [16] On January 25, to prevent the production of false departure authorizations , officials forbad rural soviets and kolkhoz directors from providing peasants with the usual certificates permitting kolkhoz members to travel. During the last week of January, some 25 000 runaways were intercepted. Two months after the start of the operation, more than 225 000 people had been apprehended, 85 percent of whom were sent back to their villages. [17] The weekly reports of the OGPU on the measures taken to stop the massive exodus of peasants addressed directly to Stalin and Molotov made no mention, of course, of the physical condition of those apprehended.

The Famine at Its Height (February-July 1933)

During February-July 1933, the period marking the height of the famine, the higher officials of the Ukrainian GPU drafted a few documents (very few, in fact) on what was actually happening in the starving Ukrainian countryside that help supplement the accounts provided by survivors in later years. Thus, in one revealing communication, Balitskyi instructed his subordinates:

> Provide information on the food problems only to the First Secretaries of the regional committees of the Party and only orally, after carefully checking the reports. This is to ensure that written notes on the subject do not circulate through the *apparatus*, where they might stir rumors& Do not write specific reports for the Ukrainian GPU. It is sufficient for me to be personally informed by personal letters from the leaders addressed to me directly. [18]

It is interesting to compare the rare sources unearthed from the central archives of the secret service agencies of the former Soviet Union (the forerunners of the KGB, now the FSB) to other more loquacious internal reports written by officials in various administrations that show quite clearly that the secret famine was no secret at all (Danilov, 2006; *Bulletin IHTP*, 2003: 340; Werth and Moullec, 1994: 152-159). They also convey an aloof police vision of the food problems , which were attributed to sabotage perpetrated in the agriculture of Ukraine by kulak and counter-revolutionary elements [that had] infiltrated the kolkhozes, sovkhozes, and some of the villages . [19] This attitude emerges starkly in the details provided by Krouklis, the head of the regional department of the Dnipropetrovsk GPU, concerning the autopsies performed under his authority. In attempting to determine the exact causes of death of those who had starved (Did these individuals *really* die of hunger? Were these not cases of enemy provocation ?), or investigating cannibalism and necrophagia, Krouklis reported in the manner of the detached ethnologist describing the savage customs of a primitive tribe . [20] A similar tone is apparent in a communication sent by Rozanov, the head of the Kyiv GPU, to Balitskyi:

> One might even say that cannibalism has become a habit. There are some who were suspected of

> cannibalism last year and are now backsliding again, killing children, acquaintances, even strangers on the street. In the villages that are affected by cannibalism, every passing day strengthens people s belief that it is acceptable to eat human flesh. This idea is particularly widespread among the starving and children. [21]

The reports of the OGPU chiefs also reflect very clearly the dread of a mass uprising of starving peasants, whose anti-Soviet talk was systematically noted, especially in the reports-compilations of letters written by peasants and seized by a highly vigilant postal surveillance. [22] With the famine raging stronger than ever, the deportation of tens of thousands of starving peasants continued and grandiose plans were laid for the deportation of millions of kulak, counter-revolutionary, and socially harmful elements (Werth, 2006). At the same time, the powers of the *troîki* (special courts) were further tightened for fear of peasant insurrections. [23] Police reports show too how hazardous it is to determine the number of famine victims given that the officials of the rural soviets " often decimated themselves when entire districts were subject to a complete blockade as punishment for having failed to fulfill their sacred obligations before the State " no longer kept up the civil register (births, deaths, marriages). Moreover, the dead were not always buried anymore, while others were simply dumped into communal pits. [24] It is estimated that barely 32 percent of the four million deaths were recorded by the state authorities at the peak of the famine (Andreiev, Darskii, and Kharkova, 1998: 82).

The new documents also throw some light on the question of food assistance provided in the final hour to certain districts hit by the famine. As recent studies have shown (Davies, Tauger, and Wheatcroft, 1995; and Ginsberg, 1990), between January-June 1933, when the famine reached its greatest height and reach, the central authorities passed no fewer than thirty-five resolutions on aid to regions affected by food problems . Assistance rose to about 320 000 tons, which, applied to the some thirty million people hit by the famine, amounts to only ten kilos of grain per person, or scarcely 3 percent of a peasant s average annual consumption! In 1932, the USSR exported 1 730 000 tons of grain and another 1 680 000 tons in 1933. In addition, at the beginning of 1933, state reserves reached more than 1 800 000 tons (Danilov, 2001: 7-47). As for the paltry food aid, no doubt only a small portion actually reached the villages, since the cities of Ukraine and the northern Caucasus were also severely hurt by the famine (Kharkiv lost more than 120 000 inhabitants in one year alone, while medium-sized cities like Krasnodar or Stavropol lost 40 000 and 20 000 respectively) and absorbed most of the emergency food (Shapoval and Vasilev, 2001: 104-105; Werth, 2003).

Instructions sent by Balitskyi on March 19, 1993 on the measures to be taken in connection with the food problems specify that the emergency food supplies, accorded on a class basis , were exclusively for the benefit of those who deserved them, i.e. in order of priority, kolkhoz members with a significant number of work days, brigadiers, tractor operators, families with a least one member in the Red Army, kolkhoz members and individual peasants who had chosen to join the kolkhoz . Balitskyi s circular in fact focused on the repressive measures that were to be taken against the kulak, counter-revolutionary, parasitical, and enemy elements of all kinds that sought to exploit the food problems for their own counter-revolutionary purposes, spreading rumors about the famine and various horrors , purposely leaving the dead unburied . [25]

In the spring of 1933, the reports of the Ukrainian GPU reveal another major pre-occupation, namely how to ensure the working of the fields for the next harvest in the regions ravaged by the famine. As we saw earlier, in November 1932, the Second Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party Khataevich had warned Molotov that, Soon there will be nobody left to sow and prepare for the next crop! . A few months later, officials were faced with this very scenario. Given their weakened state, surviving kolkhoz members were hard pressed to rebuild their work force, as those reporting realized, albeit not without some cynicism: The very few who still work are unable to fulfill quotas. Consequently, they do not receive enough bread and begin to bloat. [26] In an attempt to deal with the dramatic loss of rural labor, the authorities, backed up by the military, began by mobilizing a part of the urban population, which was sent to the fields. The

Italian consul in Kharkiv reported what he witnessed: The mobilization of the urban forces has assumed enormous proportions... This week, at least 20 000 people were sent to the countryside... The day before yesterday, they surrounded the market, seized all able persons, men, women, and adolescents, transported them to the station under GPU guard, and shipped them to the fields (Graziosi, 1989: 77). Later, officials resorted to mass transfers of colonists from other parts of the USSR: More than 200 000 peasants were displaced in 1933-34 towards the areas devastated by the famine, most as soon as they had completed their military service.

The OGPU reports on conditions in the countryside in Ukraine and the northern Caucasus also speak of the incredible repression and brutalization that accompanied the hunger and starvation. Rural banditry soared and, more generally, society witnessed a rise of extraordinary violence on a daily basis in a world traumatized and overwhelmed by a relentless permanent hunger: Lynched thieves, including children caught on trains trying to pinch a few vegetables, summary judgments (*samosudy*) administered by the peasants themselves, tortures, brutalities, exactions of all kinds, child abandonment, cannibalism and necrophagia& The extreme violence committed by the regime and its representatives against the population ended by driving people to the same in their every-day lives.

Accounts by survivors, gathered at several points (in the 1950s among the émigrés of the second wave , and in the 1990s in Ukraine itself, after the fall of the USSR) constitute another invaluable source for understanding the famine, not only from the inside but from the perspective of its victims. All describe the incredible fury and determination of the activist brigades , made up of policemen and local Party chiefs, but often also of people from outside the village. Together, they systematically confiscated the peasants last food reserves. Their exactions, which often resembled a mass plundering (anything having the slightest market value was confiscated, in addition to food products) demonstrate that their objective was not only to fulfill the grain collection plan at all costs , but also to punish the peasants who were hostile to the kolkhoz system, which they perceived as a second serfdom . These peasants tried to survive by gleaning (stealing , according to the authorities) a few stalks or some potatoes in the collective fields, hiding a chicken, or growing a tiny vegetable garden (at the expense of collective labor). The testimonies also paint a terrible picture of the slow agony of death by starvation, the progressive de-humanization of the victims, and the multiplication of transgressions against others (anthropophagia, the mass abandonment of young children, collective suicides).

Not all segments of the population were affected to the same extent however. The accounts show that the Ukrainian countryside paid a higher price than the cities, which were inhabited by a strong minority of non-Ukrainians (Russians, Poles, Jews); and ordinary peasants were more vulnerable than kolkhoz members or the specialists (technicians, tractor-operators). In the end, the surviving testimonies underline the sense of total abandonment felt by the inhabitants of the rural zones left to starve, trapped in their village, deprived of even the slightest food aid, in a word " condemned to death.

The Famine: A Genocide?

Since the late 1980s, the rediscovery of the 1932-33 famine has played a crucial role in Ukrainian political life, in the confrontation between those advocating a break with the USSR (and then with Russia) and others who prefer to maintain close ties with the big Russian brother . The *Holodomor* (from *holod*/hunger, *moryty*/killed by privation, starved, exhausted), as Ukraine now calls the intentional mass extermination of its population has not only been the centre of political and cultural debate, but has become an integral part of the process of state and national reconstruction in post-Soviet Ukraine. It is within this context that, following lengthy discussions, the Parliament of the Republic of Ukraine officially recognized the 1932-33 famine as a genocide perpetrated by Stalin s regime against the Ukrainian people. Six months later, on the

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70th anniversary of the *Holodomor*, the United Nations General Assembly drafted a declaration recognizing that the great famine of 1932-33, the result of a cruel policy of a totalitarian regime... constituted a national tragedy for the Ukrainian people (*Ukrainian Weekly*, 2003: 1). The declaration did not, however, equate the famine with a genocide.

The question of whether the 1932-33 famine constitutes a genocide is a matter of disagreement among historians studying the calamity, whether Russians, Ukrainians, or their Western counterparts. There are basically two schools of thought. Some historians see the famine as an artificially organized phenomenon, planned since 1930 by the Stalinist regime to break the particularly strong resistance of Ukrainian peasants to the kolkhoz system. In addition, this plan sought to destroy the Ukrainian nation, at its national-peasant core, which constituted a serious obstacle to the transformation of the USSR into a new imperial state dominated by Russia. According to this view, the famine was a genocide. [27] At the other end of the analytical spectrum are scholars who recognize the criminal nature of the Stalinist policies, but believe that it is necessary to assess all of the famines that took place between 1931-33 (in Kazakhstan, Ukraine, western Siberia and Volga regions) as part of a complex phenomenon shaped by numerous factors, from the geopolitical context to the demands of an accelerated industrialization and modernization drive, in addition to Stalin s imperial objectives . From this perspective, the 1932-33 famine in Ukraine and the Kuban was not a genocide (Davies and Wheatcroft, 2004; Martin, 2001; Ivnitskii, 1996b; Kondrashin and Penner, 2002).

The Italian historian Andrea Graziosi, a specialist on Ukrainian history, recently proposed a fusion of these two arguments on the basis of a comparative analysis of the various Soviet famines that took place in the early 1930s and an in depth study of the chronology of events (Graziosi, 2005: 453-472). According to this view, the famines that hit the USSR beginning in 1931 were the direct, but not foreseen or planned, result of the ideologically-driven policies implemented since late 1929 " forced collectivization, de-kulakization, the imposition of the kolkhoz system, and excessive grain and livestock levies. Up until the summer of 1932, the Ukrainian famine, already rearing its head, resembled the other famines that had started earlier elsewhere. However, from this point forward, the nature of the Ukrainian famine changed, with Stalin deciding to use hunger as a weapon, to aggravate the famine that was just beginning. Choosing to instrumentalize the famine, Stalin intentionally amplified it in order to punish the Ukrainian peasants who rejected the new serfdom and to break Ukrainian nationalism , which he saw as a threat to his goal of constructing a centralized and dictatorial Soviet state. And while hunger hit the peasants harder than any other group, resulting in the death of millions in atrocious conditions, another form of repression, of a police nature, struck others in Ukraine at the same moment " the political and intellectual elites, from village teachers to national leaders, via the intelligentsia. Tens of thousands of Ukrainians were arrested and punished with camp sentences. In December 1932, two secret Politburo decrees put an end in Ukraine, and *only in Ukraine*, to the indigenization policy applied to Party cadres since 1923 in all of the federal republics: Ukrainian nationalism was firmly condemned (Martin, 2001: 273-308).

Two fundamental issues need to be considered in defining the Ukrainian famine of 1932-33 as a genocide, along lines set by the December 1948 United Nations Convention: intention and the ethnic-national targeting of a group (Article II of the Convention recognizes only national, ethnic, racial, and religious groups, not social or political). In the case of Ukraine, sufficient evidence exists to demonstrate intention. A crucial document on this point is the resolution of January 22, 1933 signed by Stalin, ordering the blockade of Ukraine and the Kuban, a region of the Caucasus with a majority-Ukrainian population. The blockade intentionally worsened the famine in Ukrainian-populated areas *and in these areas alone*. On the question of target group, i.e. whether Stalin viewed the peasants of Ukraine and the Kuban as peasants or as Ukrainians, which is key to justifying use of the term genocide, scholars disagree. For some historians (Martin, Penner), the famine s primary objective was to break peasant rather than national resistance. Others (Serbyn, Shapoval, Kulchytsky, Vasilev) argue that the peasants of Ukraine and the Kuban were targeted first as Ukrainians: For Stalin, the Ukrainian peasant question was in essence, a national question,

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the peasants constituting the principal force of the national movement (Stalin, 1954: 71). By crushing the peasantry, one was breaking the most powerful national movement capable of opposing the process of the construction of the USSR. As the famine decimated the Ukrainian peasantry, the regime condemned the entire policy of Ukrainization underway since the early 1920s: The Ukrainian elites were rounded up and arrested.

This specifically anti-Ukrainian assault makes it possible to define the totality of intentional political actions taken from late summer 1932 by the Stalinist regime against the Ukrainian peasantry as genocide. With hunger as its deadly arm, the regime sought to punish and terrorize the peasants, resulting in fatalities exceeding four million people in Ukraine and the northern Caucasus. That being said, the *Holodomor* was very different from the Holocaust. It did not seek to exterminate the Ukrainian nation in its entirety, and it did not involve the direct murder of its victims. The *Holodomor* was conceived and fashioned on the basis of political reasoning and not of ethnic or racial ideology. However, by the sheer number of its victims, the *Holodomor*, seen again in its historical context, is the only European event of the 20th century that can be compared to the two other genocides, the Armenian and the Holocaust.

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[11] RGASPI,81/3/215/25-33.

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