

# ***The Ukrainian Genocide Actually Happened: But That's not What Walter Duranty Reported***

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In 1932, Walter Duranty, a reporter with the *New York Times*, won the Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of Stalin's first Five Year Plan. The official announcement of his Pulitzer win read, "Mr. Duranty's dispatches show profound and intimate comprehension of conditions in Russia and of the causes of those conditions ... they are marked by scholarship, profundity, impartiality, sound judgment and exceptional clarity, and are excellent examples of the best type of foreign correspondence."

In actuality, he was all but touting the official Soviet line, and effectively making the execution of genocide of Ukrainian farmers just a touch easier for the Soviet leader, Stalin.

*"What are a few million dead Russians in a situation like this? Quite unimportant. This is just an incident in the sweeping historical changes here. I think the entire matter is exaggerated."* -- Walter Duranty

## **Just an exaggeration**

Miron Dolot came from the village of Cherkasy, north of the capital city of Kyiv. Most homes in his village had only one room for all the family's activities. The walls were made of clay and the floor of dirt. Most roofs were made of thatched straw. Tin was considered a sign of prosperity. Perhaps out of necessity, the community of about 800 households was a close-knit and an open one. Though not wealthy by any means, Dolot writes, "We had always been completely self-sufficient and had never gone hungry for so long."

The famine would force them to endure otherwise.

The arbitrary and unexpected middle-of-the-night arrest of 15 of the village's most prominent citizens in January 1930, and the subsequent confiscation of their property and deportation of their families to the remote north of Russia, suffused the community with a sense of dread and foreboding. In actuality, the Ukrainian peasantry had little idea what horror the next three years would bring.

Cherkasy deportees, destined for Siberia or the remote Russian north, were loaded onto sleighs of six to eight people, without consideration of age or kin. Dolot writes, "As one sleigh moved to join a column, a young man sprang from it and raced toward another sleigh in which his helpless and weeping wife and children were riding. The father obviously wanted to be with his family, but he did not reach them. Comrade Pashchenko, the chairman of the village Soviet who was supervising the whole action, raised his revolver and calmly fired.

The young father dropped dead into the snow, and the sleigh carrying his widow and orphans moved on."

## **Breaking eggs**

"You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs," said 1932 Pulitzer Prize winning *New York Times* journalist Walter Duranty. Considered the top expert on Russian affairs in his field, and one of the few Western journalists allowed access beyond Soviet borders, Duranty's reports might as well have been taken for gospel.

One question, however, whether it is better to go hungry when Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin is the master chef.

The idea of Stalinism, a term used to describe its namesake's totalitarian aspirations, was that of socialism in one country as opposed to the universal Marxist scheme. Soviet socialism was to be achieved through rapid industrialization concurrent with the strengthening of the state - both of which were instituted by terror.

Duranty wrote in one of his prize-winning articles that "the Stalinist machine is better organized for the formation and control of public opinion than anything history has hitherto known."

He may well have been correct. The Soviet Empire was a largely rural one, populated by farmers who lived independently off their own harvests, and who represented the last major source of opposition to the creeping stronghold of the state.

Though private agriculture was significantly improving and growing, Stalin's desire for control took precedence over economic goals. To ensure his power over the peasant farmers, Stalin introduced the mandatory collectivization of farms, which forced the renouncement of private property and the centralization of resources. The idea, at least on the surface, was to increase the efficiency and productivity of the agricultural sector in order to fund industrialization, and in turn, to realize Stalin's ambition of advancing beyond the world of Western capitalism.

Enter the Five Year Plan, which called for impossibly high quotas of production, whatever the human and environmental costs. Thanks to the apologetic bent of many of the day's leading artists and intellectuals, and to the apparent integrity of journalists like Duranty, the resultant deaths and devastation of millions would, at least for a time, remain a dirty little Soviet secret.

### **Making omelets**

Dolot recalls when, in February 1930, the first armed military and secret police installments rolled into the village. Following on the heels of a propaganda brigade that had destroyed the village church, they were meant to enforce the collectivization that the peasants were obstinately refusing. Heavy artillery was set up in the remains of the church - now a theatre for Communist propaganda - and around the village square. Villagers were told that *kulaks*, a derisive Russian term for a relatively well to do farmer, were the stumbling block to a better, more fulfilled - read collectivized - life.

The Communist party called for the destruction of *kulaks* as a class in order to ensure a better and more prosperous life. The problem lay in the ambiguity of the term. Party officials themselves weren't necessarily sure who should be considered *kulak*, but included among them any farmer who failed to show adequate enthusiasm for collectivizing. Opposing the will of the party was tantamount to treason, and those resisting collectivization were warned that "among you are those who act like the enemy of the people ... even the smallest attempt to oppose the measures of our beloved Communist party and the people's government will be suppressed ... we'll crush you like detestable vermin."

As a result, hundreds of thousands of unbending peasants and their families were dragged from their homes, packed into freight trains, and shipped thousands of miles to the north where they were dumped amidst Arctic wastes, often without food or shelter. Many died along the way, or shortly after arrival in the harsh

wilderness. Given what was to transpire at home, which was the kinder alternative becomes something of a moot point.

*"Wise old (Bernard) Shaw, high-minded old (Henri) Barbusse, the venerable (Sidney and Beatrice) Webbs, (Andre) Gide the pure in heart and (Pablo) Picasso the impure, down to poor little teachers, crazed clergymen and millionaires, driveling dons and very special correspondents like Duranty, all resolved, come what might, to believe anything, however villainous, to approve anything, however obscurantist and brutally authoritarian, in order to be able to preserve intact the confident expectation that one of the most thorough-going, ruthless and bloody tyrannies ever to exist on earth could be relied on to champion human freedom, the brotherhood of man, and all the other good liberal causes to which they had dedicated their lives." - Malcolm Muggeridge, Manchester Guardian*

*"Who could suppose that so many leading intellectuals were prostituting their minds for the sake of a foreign tyrant?" - Joseph Sobran*

### **Dinner is served**

Stalin employed an intricate and masterfully orchestrated program of denial. In 1931, nearly the entire Ukrainian crop was removed to the Russian Republic and/or exported globally at market bottom prices to showcase Soviet prosperity. Foreign aid was resisted, and a tour route was established through cities like Kyiv and Kharkiv, which were deliberately cleaned of death and hunger in hopes that foreign politicians and correspondents would give "glowing accounts of Soviet achievement."

In addition to a veritable catalogue of intellectuals who bought the lie, the League of Nations all but dismissed rumours of famine circulating around the then-Polish-occupied Galicia region of Ukraine. Protesters inside Ukraine were met with denial, and were accused of "misinterpreting the facts." It was personal sloth, the starving peasants were told; that alone was the reason for their hunger. In the pages of the *New York Times*, Duranty echoed the official sentiment, insisting that "there is no actual starvation or deaths from starvation, but there is widespread mortality from diseases due to malnutrition."

*"Enemies and foreign critics can say what they please. Weaklings and despondents at home may groan under the burden, but the youth and strength of the Russian people is essentially at one with the Kremlin's program, believes it worthwhile and supports it, however hard be the sledding." - Walter Duranty*

### **Dessert**

1932: spring brought forth not the promise of new life, but rather the first deaths from hunger. Ukraine's food supply had run dry and the *kulaks* were eradicated as a class, but the oppression did not abate. On the contrary, Stalin continued to intensify his stronghold over the peasant farmers. The party's Bread Procurement Commission was in full force, searching homes and confiscating any food, even jars of seeds set aside for planting.

They were ruthless, searching in the lining of clothing, digging up fields and tearing down walls in homes, because surely if the peasants weren't dying, they were eating something. Whatever they might have been eating was "stolen" from the state. According to new laws passed to protect "socialist property," catching a fish in the river or gathering branches for firewood was theft. To take a stock of corn forgotten at harvest was

punishable by a minimum of 10 years in the Gulag if the armed guards overlooking the fields from their watchtowers didn't shoot the offender dead first.

An internal passport system was established to limit peasant mobility, effectively imprisoning people in their villages, where in cities they might have secured work and rations. Emigration out of the country was strictly out of the question.

*"We couldn't help feeling that we were pawns in some lethal game. Each of our moves to escape death was met with some official countermove; each of our measures to overt it was opposed with official countermeasures." - Miron Dolot*

## **Apertifs**

Ivan Kasiianenko could not forget, even if he tried, the horrors of that year.

The Bread Procurement Commission came to inspect his home, helping themselves to the family's meager possessions and confiscating all foodstuffs. The Soviets locked his mother in the basement, where she remained for two weeks. With his father away in hiding, the five young children were left to fend for themselves. Shortly after the Soviets came to release the mother, they took the family cow, depriving the household of their sole source of nourishment. By the spring of 1933, Kasiianenko's four siblings had followed one another to their graves. That Holy Thursday saw the death and burial of his father; his mother followed two days later and was thrown in a hole on Easter Sunday.

The Communist party, of course, was never at fault, but rather sought out scapegoats to shoulder the blame for the devastation they were causing. A party representative in Dolot's village announced at a weekly propaganda meeting that "the real culprits who distorted the party line and brought so much suffering to your village were the Jews ... not our dear Communist party." He proclaimed further that the Jews had, for generations, been raised to believe Ukrainians to be anti-Semites responsible for violence and atrocities against them, and to retaliate, infiltrated the Communist party and exacted their revenge upon the Ukrainian people.

Stunned by the sentiment, Dolot feared that, despite anti-discrimination laws in effect at the time, the party "seemed to be actually inciting a pogrom against the Jews." The "revelations and accusations" against Jews, Dolot insists, were unprecedented, and the party representative espousing them had "no success with such tactics in our village. His anti-Jewish rhetoric encountered our disdainful silence ... wherever he went, despite his rhetoric, he failed to provoke any pogroms."

## **A good-night story**

In 1930, Stalin wrote, "only dead souls leave the collective farms." Over the course of the winter of 1932-33, extreme desperation gave way to severe brutality. Murder, suicide - usually by hanging or inhalation of coal fumes - and suspicions of cannibalism were so prevalent they were no longer news. There were accounts of mothers who had "lost their sanity and turned into animals, smothering their own children and eating them."

In Cherkasy, a woman was found in her home hung by a crude noose, and the flesh of her burnt toddler was found in the oven. When Dolot went to check on the status on an aunt, he found her headless body lying on the floor, her head a few feet away. She had hung herself, and her neck had given way as the body

decomposed. A relative of a close friend attacked Dolot with a butcher knife; the man had been rumoured to be cannibalizing village residents, including his own family. When the Bread Procurement Commission arrived to search his home, rather than finding grain, they found a heap of human remains, bones and skulls. As souls were leaving the collective at a rate of 25,000 per day, the *New York Times* ran a front page headline announcing: "All Russia Suffers Shortage of Food; Supplies Dwindling."

Duranty's following text insisted that "there is no famine, or actual starvation, nor is there likely to be."

The harvest of 1932 could not meet Stalin's demands, but much of what the Communist party soldiers had confiscated had been transported to railroad stations, dumped on the ground, covered with tarpaulins, and left to rot. The dead and sometimes the dying - or those perceived to be - were collected in much the same way. A party brigade routinely gathered corpses and dumped them outside town limits or in mass graves to do the same.

Rot.

*"Our village had become a desolate place, horror lurking in every household and every backyard. We felt forsaken by the entire world...Many houses stood dilapidated and empty...The owners were dead, deported to the north, or gone from the village in search of food...In the front yards, backyards, gardens, and all around the villagers' homes, the ground was pitted with open holes, reminders of the Bread Procurement Commissions' searches for 'hidden foodstuffs.'" - Miron Dolot*

### **Sleepy time**

As the winter melted away, vast stretches of land revealed the dirty truth. Littering the fields were the bodies of the starving farmers who had been combing the potato fields. They died where they collapsed in their endless search for food.

Ironically, in the spring of 1933, the Bread Procurement Commission still conducted searches for hidden food, continued to demand quotas, and still held mandatory propaganda meetings touting the merits of grain delivery to the state. Any famine was ardently denied as survivors were told that those who were lazy and refused to work at the collective "deserved to die."

By May 1933, the Famine was abating - and only then, Western journalists were beginning to announce that all was not what it seemed.

Malcolm Muggeridge of the *Manchester Guardian* traveled to Ukraine on the sly, finding the population "starving in the absolute sense; not undernourished." He informed the British Embassy upon his return to Moscow that he had witnessed "one of the most monstrous crimes in history, so terrible that people in the future will scarcely be able to believe it ever happened." Soon after, Gareth Jones, former secretary to British Prime Minister Lloyd George published a letter in the *New York Times*, reflecting on his visit to 20 villages in the affected region over the course of three weeks. He confirmed the reality of mass starvation, and condemned Duranty's incessant use of "euphemism and understatement" in coverage of affairs.

When travel restrictions eased that August, Duranty finally toured Ukraine himself. The result? He emerged, denouncing the reports of his peers and claiming instead that "any report of a famine in Russia is today an exaggeration or malignant propaganda."

Before the end of 1933, U.S. President Roosevelt granted the USSR full diplomatic recognition. Not only was Duranty among the president's consultants, but he was also the sole Western journalist traveling to Washington with the Soviet foreign minister as the latter went to broker the deal.

On Christmas Day of 1933, Stalin himself told Duranty, "You have done a good job in your reporting on the USSR."

*"I'm a reporter, not a humanitarian." - Walter Duranty*

### **The truth shall set you free**

Since the inception of the Pulitzer in 1917, no prize has ever been revoked. The dilemma behind revoking Duranty's award is that it was given for reports published in 1931, officially pre-dating the genocide. However, the nature of these pieces, if not serving as apologist propaganda, helped keep the world ignorant of the brutal realities of life behind the Iron Curtain, and compounded the suffering of millions. *New York Times* editor Bill Keller has acknowledged that "it's absolutely true that the work Duranty did ...was credulous, uncritical parroting of propaganda," but the paper has neither returned the prize nor issued an apology for their part in promoting Duranty's lies.

Instead, Duranty's Pulitzer stands on display at the *New York Times* with an attached notation stating that "other writers in the *New York Times* and elsewhere have discredited this coverage."

In conjunction with the 70th anniversary of the Ukrainian genocide, Ukrainian organizations worldwide are campaigning to have Duranty's Pulitzer revoked. The Pulitzer Board, as a result, has received over 15,000 postcards and thousands more letters and emails, demanding that the prize be stripped.

The man spearheading the campaign, Dr. Lubomyr Luciuk, insists that the integrity of both the Pulitzer and the *New York Times* is on the line, and that the board should either revoke the win or the paper should return the prize willingly.

A similar review conducted in 1990 let the Pulitzer stand, but the USSR's collapse the year following made at least a portion of the secret Soviet archives available for study. The documents relating to the Ukrainian genocide only confirmed what was already suspected. The board's decision is expected in mid-November.

*"The novelty of this particular famine, what made it so diabolical, is that it was not the result of some catastrophe like a drought or an epidemic. It was the deliberate creation of a bureaucratic mind which ... then announces it in the slavish press as one of the great triumphs of the regime." - Malcolm Muggeridge*

### **Wake up and smell the irony**

In June, the Canadian Senate unanimously adopted a motion recognizing the famine of 1923-33 as genocide. In October, the Australian Senate followed suit, recognizing it as "one of the most heinous acts of genocide in

history." The U.S. House of Representatives also unanimously adopted a resolution commemorating the "millions of men, women and children [who] were murdered by starvation so that one man, Soviet dictator Josef Stalin, could consolidate control over Ukraine," condemning both Western apathy and Duranty's deliberate denial.

In October, an academic famine-genocide conference in Italy ended with a resolution, urging Italian premier and president of the European Union Silvio Berlusconi and president of the European Commission Romano Prodi to support efforts to gain international recognition of the Ukrainian Famine of 1932-33 as an act of genocide.

Ironically, the United Nations does not currently recognize this distinction, and is pressuring the United States to replace the word "genocide" with "crime against humanity."

### **This just in: journalism accuracy has improved**

The BBC has described *New York Times* reporter Jayson Blair's recent plagiarism, fraud and fabrication scandal as "the biggest scandal in the history of America's most distinguished newspaper."

That the BBC, a reputable and influential member of the media, could turn so blind an eye to such a major historical tragedy as the Ukrainian genocide is disturbing. It suggests that to this day either few people have an awareness of the brutality of the Stalinist regime, or that the BBC is turning a blind eye just as Duranty did 70 years ago. One can only wonder what horrific realities - famine, genocide or otherwise - these major news agents are choosing to ignore at present.

### **The sad reality of it all**

The reality of the Ukrainian famine of 1932-1933 is that it was utterly preventable. As Malcolm Muggeridge recalls, "everybody knew about it. There was no question about that ... I could also see that all the correspondents in Moscow were distorting it." Walter Duranty, and probably the *New York Times*, also knew the truth: as early as June 1931, Duranty admitted to the U.S. Embassy in Berlin that "in agreement with the *New York Times* and the Soviet authorities ... official dispatches always reflected the official opinion of the Soviet regime." He also admitted to British diplomats that "as many as 10 million people may have starved to death."

After visiting Ukraine in 1933, Duranty reported that "the populace, from babies to old folks, looks healthy and well nourished." Sixteen years later, however, he confessed to have driven "nearly two hundred miles across the country ... through land that was lost to the weeds and through villages that were empty."

But Duranty knew the truth about the famine, denied it, and actively kept the world ignorant of it.

And when it was all over?

"Ukraine," he admitted, "had been bled white."

*The Pulitzer Prize Board recently released the results of their review of the decision to award Walter Duranty the Pulitzer Prize. In a move guaranteed to ensure Stalin's legacy of injustice lives on, they opted to let the decision stand.*