

Liberty University

**Unwritten:  
The Hidden History of the Holodomor**

A Thesis Submitted to  
the Department of History

by

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## Abstract

Between 1930 and 1933, Joseph Stalin unleashed an assault on Ukraine that resulted in the starvation of 5 million people. Their story went untold for decades. The fact that Soviet propaganda was largely successful in suppressing the truth speaks less to its sophistication than to the gullibility and complicity of Westerners. Although there were truth-tellers from Great Britain, the United States, and even Europe who accurately reported on the Ukrainian famine, Stalin understood that such voices could be effectively neutralized.

Because the story of the Holodomor remained essentially unwritten, the West did not recognize it as the legitimate offspring of Communist ideology. The oversight allowed space and time for Communist doctrine to proliferate outside the bounds of historical judgment. Western intellectuals espoused and promoted Soviet ideology, granting it a measure of acceptability that would have been precluded by the accurate historical account of Communism as a conveyor of immeasurable injustice and suffering.

## Statement of Purpose

Philosophy was once considered the handmaiden of theology. Unfortunately, it reached a state of autonomy in the modern era and unleashed all manner of untenable thought systems that are inconsistent with man's actual experience of the world. It is necessary, therefore, to drive these false ideologies to their logical conclusions by identifying the real-world consequences they have produced. In other words, by writing their history. Jesus said that wisdom is proved right by her children; it must be that *history* serves as the handmaiden to theology.

This paper represents the handmaiden's verdict on atheistic socialism.

2 Corinthians 10:5

To the mothers of the Holodomor  
who stood alone against the power of the Soviet State  
and fought to feed your children

It is through your eyes that I first learned of the Holodomor.

Your stories deserve to be written and remembered.

Remember the former things long past...

Isaiah 46:9

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## **Part One**

### **“Truth Has Stumbled in the Streets”**

## Chapter 1

### The Hidden History of the Holodomor

Ask a classroom of elementary-aged children to name the greatest villain of history and they will most likely respond with “Hitler.” A few might be able to come up with Osama bin Laden. Whatever the case may be, it is certain that no child will think of Joseph Stalin, the murderous dictator who arrested, tortured, starved, and otherwise crushed his own people, not for the space of a few years, but over the entire three decades of his God-forsaken rule.

One of the most poignant episodes from the era occurred between 1930 and 1933, in the southwestern reaches of the Soviet Empire. There, Stalin unleashed an assault on Ukraine that resulted in the deaths of 5 million people. The Ukrainians were not his only victims, but they seem to have suffered longer and more deeply than the rest.<sup>1</sup> The final tragedy is that their story went untold for decades. The Soviets methodically suppressed population statistics, state archives, and any other evidence that might point to the truth of what happened. Meanwhile, they effectively manufactured a narrative that was far more palatable to Russians and to the Western world.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that Soviet propaganda was largely successful speaks less to its sophistication than to the gullibility and complicity of Westerners. Although there were truth-tellers from Great Britain, the United States, and even Europe who accurately reported on the Ukrainian crisis, Stalin understood that such voices could be effectively neutralized by contradictory reports

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<sup>1</sup>Fred Beal, *Word from Nowhere* (London: Right Book Club, 1938), 255; Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 302, 303, 306; Dana Dalrymple, “The Soviet Famine of 1932-1934,” *Soviet Studies* 15, no. 3 (January 1964): 250; Andrea Graziosi, “The Soviet 1931-1933 Famines and the Ukrainian Holodomor: Is a New Interpretation Possible, and What Would Its Consequences Be?” *Harvard Ukrainian Journal* 27, no. 1 (2004-2005): 97. Clarence Manning, *Ukraine Under the Soviets* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1953), 101.

<sup>2</sup>Graziosi, “The Soviet 1931-33 Famines and the Ukrainian Holodomor: Is a New Interpretation Possible, and What Would Its Consequences Be?” 98.



submitted to major news outlets by communist sympathizers, coupled with wholesale fabrications released by the Kremlin. Stalin became quite adept at manipulating world opinion and hijacking the truth; he cut his teeth on the horrific famine that he created. His artful denials of the crimes against Ukraine marked the first major propaganda campaign aimed at influencing a foreign audience.<sup>3</sup> The overwhelming success of the campaign guaranteed the continued use of disinformation and truth suppression as effective tools for furthering his Soviet agenda.

His state-imposed famine came to be known as the *Holodomor*, literally, “murder by hunger.” Books have been written, eyewitness testimonies have been recorded, archives have been opened, and yet American schoolchildren do not recognize Stalin’s name, nor do they understand the communist legacy of deception and oppression to which he so abundantly contributed. The West did not internalize the Holodomor nor recognize it as the legitimate offspring of communist ideology. The oversight allowed space and time for communist doctrine to proliferate outside the bounds of historical judgment. Western intellectuals espoused and promoted Soviet ideology, granting it a measure of acceptability that would have been precluded by the accurate historical account of communism as a conveyer of immeasurable injustice and suffering.

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State-imposed famine was actually the third phase of Soviet efforts to subdue Ukraine. The first two phases were collectivization and dekulakization.<sup>4</sup> Stalin’s chief concern was the particularly strong sense of nationalism within Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> The nation did not consider itself a satellite of Russia, but rather an independent nation with a separate language and culture. This

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<sup>3</sup>Conquest, 308.

<sup>4</sup>Moshe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 483; Vladimir N. Brovkin, “Robert Conquest’s *Harvest of Sorrow*: A Challenge to the Revisionists.” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 11, no. 1 (June 1987): 237.

<sup>5</sup>Brovkin, 235.

nationalist sentiment posed a threat to a communist ethos that proclaimed: “The proletarian has no country.”<sup>6</sup> Certainly the Ukrainians proved to be extremely resistant, even militant, in the face of collectivist efforts.<sup>7</sup>

The Great Famine was not perpetrated merely out of an economic interest in sending surplus grain to Odessa for export. It constituted a top-down offensive bent on imposing communist directives while eliminating Ukrainian resistance.<sup>8</sup> Through his increasingly higher state requisitions for grain, Stalin was not reaching for higher grain production; he reached for the control of all means of production, even if it meant a shrinking crop.<sup>9</sup> And it was not only the grain crop that Soviet agents demanded; they actually went door to door throughout the villages, forcefully confiscating or destroying every last potato, radish, or sack of flour the peasants possessed. The term *Holodomor* was merited; it was indeed murder by starvation.<sup>10</sup>

Before Soviet agents arrived to search the homes of the peasants, most families ingeniously hid stores of food. Famine survivor Stephan Horlatch later recalled that even before the Holodomor began, his mother stored bread crumbs in little bags and hid them in the house, in the stall, and even outside where they stored the straw. She also buried supplies of food, memorizing their locations as though they were coordinates on a map. In the spring, she started from the corner of the house and counted steps, going so many steps east or west, until she would stop and tell her son, “We have to dig here.” He unearthed stores of flour, grain, and sunflower seeds. Soviet agents never found her hidden bags of breadcrumbs or the buried sacks of grain. Nevertheless, they remained suspicious of the family because, in the words of Horlatch, “we

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<sup>6</sup> Conquest, 31-33.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 6, 344.

<sup>9</sup> John A. Armstrong, “Review of *The Harvest of Sorrow*.” *The American Historical Review* 92, no. 5 (Dec., 1987): 1240-1241; Conquest, 116, 183.

<sup>10</sup> Graziosi, “The Soviet 1931-33 Famines and the Ukrainian Holodomor: Is a New Interpretation Possible, and What Would Its Consequences Be?” 97-98.

were not dying.” It was highly unusual that a single mother would be able to sustain five small children through the Holodomor. For her cunning and resourcefulness, the authorities tortured her until she fainted.<sup>11</sup>

Most survivor accounts describe the importance of hiding food. Eventually, however, the food ran out. Peasants were forced to find new sources of nourishment.<sup>12</sup> If they found a dead horse along the side of the road, they ground it into cutlets for their dinner.<sup>13</sup> They made pancakes from linden leaves and corn cobs.<sup>14</sup> When even these novel food choices ran dangerously low, they showed incredible discipline in rationing. One peasant remembered the occasional loaf of bread that his father would bring from the city. His mother could make it last as long as two weeks, apportioning just a little bit for each day. She told him, “Son, a long hunger is better than a short one.”<sup>15</sup>

Peasants often traveled to the city several times to sell personal items in exchange for food. One mother routinely traveled to the nearest city to purchase food for her children. Sometimes she traveled by cart, but other times she had to walk. It was 150 kilometers away, five to six days on foot.<sup>16</sup>

The climax of the famine came in the spring of 1933. Even the most tenacious and resourceful of peasants were often unable to stave off the inevitable. One witness observed, “The

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<sup>11</sup> Stephan Horlatch, interview by Ukrainian Canadian Research and Documentation Centre, July 24, 2008, transcript, Holodomor Survivor Documentation Project, Toronto, CA.

<sup>12</sup> Oksana Kis, “Defying Death: Women’s Experience of the Holodomor, 1932-1933.” *Aspasia* 7 (2013): 49.

<sup>13</sup> Oleksandr Vdovychenko, letter to Volodymyr Maniak. June 26, 1989. Maniak Collection, Holodomor Research and Education Consortium.

<sup>14</sup> Hanna Banakh, letter to Volodymyr Maniak, December, 1988. Maniak Collection, Holodomor Research and Education Consortium.

<sup>15</sup> Volodymyr Tokar, interview by Ukrainian Canadian Research and Documentation Centre, February 17, 2009, transcript, Holodomor Survivor Documentation Project, Toronto, CA.

<sup>16</sup> Luba Semaniuk, interview by Ukrainian Canadian Research and Documentation Centre, March 17, 2009, transcript, Holodomor Survivor Documentation Project, Toronto, CA.

first who died from hunger were men. Later on the children. And last of all, the women.”<sup>17</sup> For many mothers, this was a curse. As the last to go, they were forced to watch their loved ones slowly deteriorate.

Vasily Grossman’s detailed description of starving peasant children offers some insight into what these mothers were forced to witness:

And the peasant children! Have you ever seen the newspaper photographs of the children in the German camps? They were just like that: their heads like heavy balls on thin little necks, like storks, and one could see each bone of their arms and legs protruding from beneath the skin, how bones joined, and the entire skeleton was stretched over the skin that was yellow gauze. And the children’s faces were aged, tormented, just as if they were seventy years old. And by spring they no longer had faces at all. Instead, they had birdlike heads with beaks, or frog heads – thin, wide lips – and some of them resembled fish, mouths open. Not human faces.<sup>18</sup>

In Miron Dolot’s memoirs of the Holodomor, he told of a young mother who entered his train compartment. She had two little sons with her, both of them emaciated, with bulging, dull eyes, and wearing ragged clothes. In her arms, the mother cradled a dead baby. Throughout the train ride she would press her cheeks against the baby’s cold and rigid face, kiss her eyes and forehead, and softly speak, “I am sorry...I did all I could.”<sup>19</sup>

To be sure, losing a child to starvation was heartbreaking. But when the starvation was completely unwarranted, the result of a cold-blooded directive to take food out of the mouths of Ukrainian children so that it could be exported, or even left to rot in shipping yards, the overwhelming sense of injustice must have been suffocating.

And then there was the burial. Halyna Huba’s aunt lost her six youngest children in six weeks. She buried them in the garden with the help of her remaining daughter and son. When her husband died, they did not have the strength to move him. It took them three weeks to carry him

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<sup>17</sup> Conquest, 245.

<sup>18</sup> Vasily Grossman, *Forever Flowing*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 156-157.

<sup>19</sup> Miron Dolot, *Execution by Hunger: The Hidden Holocaust* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), 185.

to his grave.<sup>20</sup> Nastia Trenbach recalled the poor mother in her village whose six children died all in one day. The burial pit had already been filled and covered up, and there was no one to dig a new pit. The mother went to the cemetery to dig a small ditch “so that she could at least lay them down.” One by one she moved the bodies into the ditch, then she lay down and died.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Halyna Huba, interview by Ukrainian Canadian Research and Documentation Centre, December 17, 2008, transcript, Holodomor Survivor Documentation Project, London, ON.

<sup>21</sup> Nastia Trenbach. letter to Volodymyr Maniak, December 13, 1988. Maniak Collection, Holodomor Research and Education Consortium.

## Chapter 2

### The Slow Emergence of Truth

No written record could do justice to the inexpressible suffering endured by the Ukrainians during this period of their history. The deeper tragedy is that Soviet Russia prevented Ukraine from writing any history at all. The Holodomor drew to a close in the summer of 1933, and the mass scale starvation deaths came to an end. Officials entered veritable ghost towns and found the dead still occupying their homes. They buried the dead. They fed the living.<sup>1</sup> Then the historical revision began. In the USSR, no word about the famine appeared in print. The Soviets forbade lecturers from referring to it and prohibited students from admitting that they had ever gone hungry.<sup>2</sup>

For decades, no scholarly treatment of the Holodomor existed, nor was there any acknowledgment of its nefarious origins; the Communists had already professed and affirmed the official narrative. Indeed, Soviet historians were forbidden from using the word *golod/holod* (hunger, famine), and could only make vague references to “food difficulties.”<sup>3</sup> Hennadii Boriak has produced evidence that the 1920-1930s Ukrainian demographic statistics were systematically destroyed or deformed by Soviet order. Even into the 1960s, Soviet archivists were destroying records because they lacked “scholarly value and practical significance.” Boriak characterizes the archival destruction as the final act of Stalin’s genocide, suggesting that, “Everyone delving into the Ukrainian archives of the 1930s meets Stalin’s ominous smile.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Conquest, 262, 250.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 258-259.

<sup>3</sup> Graziosi, “The Soviet 1931-33 Famines and the Ukrainian Holodomor: Is a New Interpretation Possible, and What Would Its Consequences Be?” 98; Alexander J. Motyl, “Deleting the Holodomor: Ukraine Unmakes Itself,” *World Affairs* 173, no. 3 (September/October 2010): 27.

<sup>4</sup> Hennadii Boriak, “Population Losses in the Holodomor and the Destruction of Related Archives: New Archival Evidence,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 30, no. 1(2008): 211-212.

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Stalin had flatly denied the existence of the famine, and Western communist sympathizers backed him up. But individualistic journalists and civilians who slipped into Ukraine without Soviet chaperones were able to report the truth to Western outlets. In the propaganda battle that ensued, Stalin did not expect to *win* the narrative. His bold denials, buttressed by phony statistics suggesting fantastic economic success, were enough to lessen the impact of the tragic tales told again and again by eyewitnesses. The aim was simply to leave the impression that “the truth lies somewhere in the middle.”<sup>5</sup> Western observers were easily led to this conclusion because the truth of what was happening in Ukraine was, quite frankly, unbelievable. The death tolls were too outrageous, the policies too cruel to be credible. And the truth tellers were effectively silenced by Moscow’s relentless assault on their credibility and integrity. The Soviets waged an ideological war in the twentieth century that far too few in the West were willing to enter. Those who were courageous enough to enter the “fight for truth” quickly discovered what the Soviets already knew: when it came to Soviet propaganda, “it was impossible to overestimate the credulity of the bourgeois states.”<sup>6</sup>

In late March, 1933, a correspondent wrote a series of articles for *The Manchester Guardian* that recorded his impressions of the Soviet collectivization of agriculture in Ukraine. His visit to the region occurred at the height of the Holodomor. The journalist encountered a starving civilian population, yet he admitted the word, “starving” seemed inadequate: “I mean starving in its absolute sense; not undernourished...but having had for weeks next to nothing to eat.” Over and over he heard the same words, “We have nothing. They have taken everything away.” The journalist concluded that the famine was organized and that the food that had been

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<sup>5</sup> Ewald Ammende, *Human Life in Russia* (Cleveland: John T. Zubal, Inc., 1984), 194.

<sup>6</sup> Ammende, 216.

confiscated from the peasants was being exported to other countries. An interview with a collective farm worker confirmed that all the grain had been taken by the government. The Soviets left the people nothing.

That his account differed strikingly from official Communist Party rhetoric was already quite apparent. But to underscore the discrepancy, the correspondent closed his column with an excerpt from Stalin's recent speech:

By developing collective farming we succeeded in drawing this entire mass of poor peasants into collective farms, in giving them security and raising them to the level of middle peasants... What does this mean? It means that no less than twenty million of the peasant population have been saved from poverty and ruin, from kulak slavery, and converted, thanks to the collective farms, into people assured of a livelihood. This is a great achievement, comrades. This is such an achievement as the world has never yet known and such as not a single State in the world has ever before secured.<sup>7</sup>

Responsible journalists understood that Communists had a vested ideological interest in denying the famine.

Gareth Jones was a Welsh journalist who conducted a "walking tour" through Ukraine and the Soviet Union in March 1933. He witnessed both the suffering of the Ukrainians and the simultaneous refutation of that suffering by Soviet officials. One day during his travels, Jones encountered a Communist who denied the existence of any famine. As they debated, Jones first threw a crust of bread, then an orange peel, into a nearby spittoon. Each time, a fellow-passenger fished out the items and quickly devoured them. In response to this, Jones noted, "the Communist subsided."<sup>8</sup>

On May 8, 1933, *The Manchester Guardian* published Jones' letter to the editor in which he condemned the attempts to discredit the correspondents reporting on the famine. He had seen for himself the swollen stomachs of the children, had heard repeatedly the single word, "golod" –

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<sup>7</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, March 25 & 27, 1933.

<sup>8</sup> Gareth Jones, *Manchester Guardian*, March 30, 1933.



i.e., “hunger.” He challenged the Soviet narrative and courageously corrected the record.

According to Jones, a true state of affairs revealed the deep hatred the peasants harbored for the Bolsheviks and their passionate opposition to Communist directives.<sup>9</sup>

As journalists continued to render realistic accounts of the famine, Soviets took steps to track their movements and stifle their reporting. Foreign correspondents were ordered not to leave Moscow without first attaining permission and submitting an itinerary.<sup>10</sup> In August of 1933 they were refused admittance into the grain-growing districts despite the glowing reports from the Kremlin that the grain harvest was exceptionally good that year. “Whence this modesty!” complained one journalist from *The Manchester Guardian*. “If now the Soviet Government refuses permission to responsible foreign correspondents...it must not be surprised if foreign opinion draws unfavourable inferences.”<sup>11</sup>

This proved to be no great threat to Stalin. His manipulation of global opinion included far more than simply restricting access to Western journalists. He also employed a strategy of disinformation executed by a team of willing accomplices, of which Walter Duranty, the pro-Soviet *New York Times* reporter, was a notable member.

In 1932, Duranty reported that there was no famine.<sup>12</sup> His August 24, 1933 column boldly declared, “Any report of a famine in Russia is today an exaggeration or malignant propaganda.”<sup>13</sup> The year prior to this he had actually blamed the peasants for the decreased harvest, maintaining that they had eaten part of the seed and selfishly harvested only for their own needs.<sup>14</sup> When it came down to a matter of which reporter would enjoy widespread

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<sup>9</sup> Gareth Jones, letter to the editor, *Manchester Guardian*, May 8, 1933.

<sup>10</sup> Conquest, 310.

<sup>11</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, August 22, 1933.

<sup>12</sup> Conquest, 319.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Duranty, *New York Times*, August 24, 1933.

<sup>14</sup> Walter Duranty, *New York Times*, August 11, 1932.

acceptance, Duranty's voice prevailed. While truth-tellers of the Ukrainian famine were the subjects of continuous and violent attack, Duranty was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. *The Nation* extolled his writing as, "the most enlightening, dispassionate and readable despatches from a great nation in the making which appeared in any nation in the world."<sup>15</sup> The fact that Duranty was honored in the West *as well as* in Soviet Russia indicates the lack of journalistic integrity that diminished the profession as a whole; the fourth estate became intertwined with the fifth column.

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While Stalin waged an ideological war through his subordinates in the journalistic realm, he also courted well-known intellectuals in the West. Because Stalin highly valued the written word as a vehicle for ideology, his favorite tools were literary figures.<sup>16</sup> George Bernard Shaw, a Fabian and former revolutionary Marxist, proved to be a particularly pliable instrument.<sup>17</sup> During Shaw's trip to Russia in 1931, Soviet henchmen chauffeured him through carefully staged scenes that glorified the success of communism.<sup>18</sup> In a statement to the London General Press the following year, Shaw confidently declared, "I did not see a single under-nourished person in Russia, young or old. Were they padded? Were their hollow cheeks distended by pieces of india rubber inside?"<sup>19</sup> It is indeed unfortunate that Shaw did not delay his trip by another year. But what would it have mattered? Soviet agents who carefully monitored the author's exposure to the Russian peasantry had easily manipulated Shaw and his surroundings. The starving little creatures of the Holodomor lived in Vasily Grossman's memory, but would never, could never

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<sup>15</sup> Conquest, 320-21.

<sup>16</sup> Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 208.

<sup>17</sup> David-Fox., 210.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>19</sup> Conquest, 316.

enter the consciousness of the arrogant and gullible Shaw. When Gareth Jones returned from his walking tour in 1933, he was convinced that, “after Stalin, the most hated man in Russia is Bernard Shaw.”<sup>20</sup> Shaw was not alone; there were many communist sympathizers from the West who championed communist ideology while steadfastly denying its collateral damage.

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Ukrainian émigrés, breathing the free air of their new homelands, were among the first non-journalists to alert the world to the tragedy experienced by their countrymen. As early as November 1933 they took part in massive protests against America’s recognition of the Soviet Union. *The Baltimore Sun* estimated 10,000 Ukrainians and American-Ukrainians marched through the streets of New York carrying banners that read, “We were free in 1918” and “Tell the truth about starvation.” Parade floats depicted starving mothers and their children crying out, “Give us bread.”<sup>21</sup> Ukrainian émigrés continued to put forth the truth but were consistently ignored by the mainstream intelligentsia of the West.

It was Dr. Ewald Ammende’s *Human Life in Russia* that marked the first ardent effort to historically document in print the dire conditions of Ukraine. It was originally published in 1936 and has been frequently footnoted in subsequent histories. Ammende was no friend of Soviet Russia, but he stopped short of indicting Stalin’s regime. Rather, he blamed the famine on a general collapse of the collective farm system. Ammende did not believe the shocking food shortage was an intentional act of genocide that was geographically focused.

Ammende worked tirelessly, even singlehandedly, to draw public attention to the famine.

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<sup>20</sup> Gareth Jones, *Manchester Guardian*, March 30, 1933.

<sup>21</sup> *The Baltimore Sun*, November 19, 1933.

James Mace, an expert in Holodomor scholarship, acknowledged that Ammende “wrote for the needy of his day, not for the historians of ours.”<sup>22</sup> Perhaps that is why western intellectuals did not mark his work as the inauguration of Holodomor studies. In any event, the resource is still valuable for tracing the survival of accurate famine accounts. Much of the content regarding the severity of the famine is repeated by later researchers. What is especially significant about Ammende’s book is that he addressed the Soviet propaganda and manipulation that successfully drowned out the truth and blunted the efforts of relief organizations.

With the onset of World War II, the free world turned its attention toward its common foe in Germany. The Allies forged any uneasy alliance with Russia and muted their discussion of the famine or of any human rights abuses initiated by the Kremlin. It was not until 1955 that concerned citizens published the next major work to focus on the Holodomor. *The Great Famine in Ukraine in 1932-1933* was printed at the expense of an émigré society known as The Democratic Organization of Ukrainians Formerly Persecuted by the Soviet Regime in the U.S.A. *The Great Famine* was the second volume of a larger work known as *The Black Deeds of the Kremlin: The White Book*. Volume Two was divided into two parts. The first section, entitled “Famine as Political Weapon,” was written by Petro Dolyna and argued that the Famine was deliberately organized for political purposes. The second section, entitled “The Great Famine in Ukraine in 1932-1933,” was compiled by Ivan Dubynets and included ample evidence from periodicals, newspapers, books, eyewitness accounts, and even photographs to corroborate the existence and severity of the Famine.

Nevertheless, the record fell silent until Dana Dalrymple published his ground-breaking article, “The Soviet Famine of 1932-34,” in 1964. James Mace later remarked that Dalrymple’s

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<sup>22</sup> James Mace, Introduction to *Human Life in Russia*, by Ewald Ammende (Cleveland: John T. Zubal, Inc., 1984), ix.

work was a notable exception to the general dearth of scholarly research in the first fifty years following the Holodomor. The article investigated the severity of the Famine, as well as its causes. It also addressed why and how the Soviets hid the famine. Dalrymple suggested that the famine was born of a desire “to beat the last of the resistance out of the peasants.” Ukrainian émigrés had already said as much, most notably in the second volume of *The White Book*, but the West almost completely ignored their testimony. Here a Westerner plainly revealed the facts of the famine and provided credible evidence of its cause. Dalrymple’s article appeared far too early to reflect the serious discussion of Stalin’s intentional program of genocidal famine; that debate would come much later. Dalrymple’s stated purpose was to clarify the record and present a comprehensive view of the famine. Unfortunately, serious Holodomor research would not begin in earnest for another two decades.

Despite the books, articles, and memoirs that were released in drips and drabs in the mid-twentieth century, the truth about communism never took hold. In time, the memory of the Holodomor was lost beneath the weight of revisionist Soviet history. Fifty years passed without any meaningful, universal judgment handed down on Stalin or the generation of leaders who carried out his murderous directives. The original sin of the Soviet system was buried, and few in the West were interested in digging it back up.

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But in the 1980s those few began to piece together the scattered and incomplete details of a horrific famine. They discovered that it was not the result of natural causes, but of the intentional policy of the Communist government to starve and subdue the Ukrainian people. Due to the decades-long Soviet effort to conceal the true nature of the famine, most of the research

necessarily focused on correcting the record with factual documentation, demographic studies, and economic/political analysis.<sup>23</sup>

The inauguration of legitimate Holodomor historiography began with Robert Conquest's 1986 book, *Harvest of Sorrow*. In the introduction to his pivotal work he plainly announced, "The purpose of this book...is to register in the public consciousness of the West a knowledge of and feeling for major events, involving millions of people and millions of deaths, which took place within living memory."<sup>24</sup> He then proceeded to deliver a devastating indictment of Stalin for his role in the Ukrainian famine. Conquest convincingly made his arguments with thorough documentation, much of it derived from Ammende and *The Black Deeds of the Kremlin*. Conquest's book, accompanied by substantial archival discoveries in the early 1990's, led to a marked increase in Holodomor scholarship.<sup>25</sup>

In truth, Conquest did far more than unearth the history of the Ukrainian famine of the early 1930s. He placed it within the context of Soviet efforts to subdue her wide-ranging territories through collectivization and dekulakization.<sup>26</sup> The argument was made throughout that the oppression was not perpetrated merely on the basis of economic concerns; it was a top-down offensive bent on defending and enforcing communist ideology and doctrines.<sup>27</sup> Conquest maintained that Stalin's chief concern was the particularly strong sense of nationalism within Ukraine.<sup>28</sup>

By referencing Stalin's dual objectives of assuming control and crushing resistance, Conquest established a clear motive for Stalin's murderous requisitions. Conquest then made the

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<sup>23</sup> Kis,43.

<sup>24</sup> Conquest, 5.

<sup>25</sup>Graziosi, "Is A New Interpretation Possible, and What Would Its Consequences Be?" 98-99.

<sup>26</sup>Brovkin, 237.

<sup>27</sup> Conquest, 6, 344.

<sup>28</sup> Brovkin, 235.

case that Stalin was well aware that his directives would result in famine, that he received reports to this effect, and that he purposely imposed further orders that would isolate the Ukrainians from areas where they could find bread.<sup>29</sup> There were no mitigating factors; it was premeditated murder.

Subsequent to Conquest's research, Holodomor scholarship deviated into two major interpretations of the famine. The first interpretation, that the famines were orchestrated by Stalin with a view toward eliminating the Ukrainian nationalist threat, was forcefully argued in Conquest's work. According to this view, Stalin recognized the Ukrainian propensity for independence and believed that in their case, a national movement would not serve the interests of the Communist Party.<sup>30</sup> Efforts at breaking the Ukrainian nationalist impulse backfired and Ukrainians fought pro-Russian programs, resisted Russian grain requisitions, and fled Ukraine and Kuban in search of food. In revenge, Stalin starved the recalcitrant citizens into oblivion. This narrative plays well for modern-day supporters of Ukrainian democracy and nation building.<sup>31</sup>

Those who hold to the second interpretation do not shy away from Stalin's criminal intent, but they are less inclined to view the famines as the result of Stalin's single-minded intent to destroy nationalist Ukraine. While the first interpretation focuses specifically on the post-September 1932 Famine, more properly understood to be the Holodomor, the second employs a pan-Soviet methodology that includes all of the major famines that occurred in Russia and its outlying territories. This general categorization places the blame for peasant starvation on a wide array of causes, from forced collectivization and extreme requisition to out-of-control

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<sup>29</sup> Conquest, 326, 328.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>31</sup> For proponents of the first interpretation, see John Mace, *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983) and Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine* (New York: Doubleday, 2017).

urbanization and peasant resistance.<sup>32</sup> The notion that famine was the conscious goal of Soviet policy is difficult to defend given this broad set of circumstances.

Andrea Graziosi is a renowned expert in Russian and Eurasian history who has published several articles on the impact of the Holodomor and the suppression of its history. Graziosi's historiographical article, "The Soviet 1931-1933 Famines and the Ukrainian Holodomor," seeks to harmonize the two major interpretations of the famine. Nevertheless, Graziosi maintains that a careful review of new evidence reveals that the Ukraine was inordinately affected by the famine and that the extremely high mortality rates there can only be explained by Soviet policies that targeted the area. Stalin's communiques do reveal an increasing intent to repress Ukrainians in particular. The countryside, whose populations were overwhelmingly Ukrainian, was specifically targeted. Villages represented the nation's spine, which Stalin needed to break.<sup>33</sup> While his policies were not initially aimed at creating a genocidal famine, Stalin was adept at using "spontaneous events" to further his agenda. Somewhere along the line he "decided to use hunger to break the peasants' opposition to collectivization." Since opposition was strongest in non-Russian regions, it stands to reason that Ukraine, with its strongly independent, anti-Soviet citizenry, would endure the most severe consequences of a state-imposed famine.<sup>34</sup>

Graziosi's synthesis of the resultant schools of thought indicates that at its outset, the Ukrainian famine/genocide "was not willfully caused with such aim in mind, but was willfully maneuvered towards this end" by Stalin. Only the so-called revisionists dispute Stalin's direct involvement in the Holodomor and the malevolent intent of his plan.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> J. Arch Getty, "Starving the Ukraine," *London Review of Books* 9 (22 January 1987): 7; Graziosi, "The Soviet 1931-1933 Famines and the Ukrainian Holodomor: Is a New Interpretation Possible?" 101; Lynne Viola, *Best Sons of the Fatherland: Workers in the Vanguard of Soviet Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 172.

<sup>33</sup> Graziosi, "The Soviet 1931-1933 Famines and the Ukrainian Holodomor: Is a New Interpretation Possible?" 104.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>35</sup> Brovkin, 241.



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Graziosi has postulated that when a significant historical event is not internalized at the moment of its happening, we allow our collective memory to set in without properly adjudicating the past. To reinsert the narrative at a later date involves the arduous task of restructuring the beliefs that were permitted to develop in the absence of truth.<sup>36</sup> For both Russian and Ukrainian citizens, this is difficult to digest. The resurfacing of truth points them to an evil empire and a wicked despot. There is no sense in which they can settle accounts with the past and initiate reforms.<sup>37</sup> There is nothing to reform. The Ukrainian famine was not an anomaly or an egregious violation of Soviet protocol; it was an intrinsic part of the Soviet system.

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The question remains: why did so many intellectuals fall victim to Stalin's propaganda? George Orwell's comment may provide a key: "The fog of lies...is not due entirely to conscious dishonesty, but any writer or journalist who is fully sympathetic to the USSR...*does have to acquiesce in deliberate falsification on important issues* [emphasis added]."<sup>38</sup> It is the nature of communist doctrine to elevate the "revolution of the proletariat" above the interests of the individual. Certain Western intellectuals were willing to suppress the truth, or at least close their eyes to it, in order to protect their pet economic/philosophical theory. Those who were complicit in the proliferation of communist propaganda at that time became tools of the Soviet regime.

For all the lofty rhetoric that surrounded socialism in general and Soviet communism in particular, the facts of history confirm that there was absolutely no merit to such sentiments.

Eventually Russian communism fell under the weight of its tragically flawed presuppositions. It

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<sup>36</sup> Andrea Graziosi, "The Great Famine of 1932-1933: Consequences and Implications," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 25, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 163.

<sup>37</sup> Graziosi, "The Soviet 1931-1933 Famines and the Ukrainian Holodomor: Is a New Interpretation Possible?" 108-109.

<sup>38</sup> Marco Carynnyk, "The Famine the 'Times' Couldn't Find," *Commentary* 76, no.5 (Nov 1, 1983): 40.

was a historical failure, and the whole world stood witness. Unfortunately, the world was not watching in 1932-33. The original sin of communism was taking place on a monumental scale, and it simply did not register in the collective consciousness of the West. Yes, there were moments when the truth emerged; the Communists could not shut it out completely. But the western intellectuals who continued to sympathize with the Soviets *willingly* overlooked these reports so as not to besmirch the nobility of the socialist cause. Communism was the dream of a utopia so highly valued that some collateral damage was acceptable, perhaps even useful, in the eyes of Soviet leadership. They had no scruples about inflicting starvation on men, women, and children. As for the fellow travelers, surely their willful ignorance of the Holodomor did not imply a tacit acceptance of the despot's maxim that the end justifies the means. Perhaps their "anointed vision" insulated them from the evidence. Jean-Francois Revel wrote, "Ideology...is an instrument of power; a defense mechanism against information; a pretext for eluding moral constraints in doing or approving evil with a clean conscience; and finally, a way of banning the criterion of experience, that is, of completely eliminating or indefinitely postponing the pragmatic criteria of success and failure."<sup>39</sup> And when preserving ideology becomes the preeminent concern, all manner of sacrifices are made at its altar.

That is why the Holodomor must be linked to its ideological origin, why it should be the first thing that comes to mind when one speaks of the rise of communism. American schoolchildren have all heard of the Holocaust, and they rightly interpret it as the horrifying consequence of fascism. It is highly unlikely, however, that we could say the same of their knowledge and understanding of the Holodomor and communism.

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<sup>39</sup> Jean-Francois Revel, *The Flight from Truth: The Reign of Deceit in the Age of Information* (New York: Random House, 1991), 228.

Stalin would have consigned the stories of the Holodomor to oblivion, along with every other account of Soviet crimes. Such is the nature of despots that they insist on creating their own reality, as though they were gods. The frightening truth is how close they come to accomplishing their ideal. In this imperfect world, Truth is not inexorable. It can be suppressed with devastating consequences.

As easy as it is to lay the blame for this ignorance with Joseph Stalin's clever machinations, it must be remembered that he had many accomplices. Writers, philosophers, journalists, even historians handled communism with kid gloves and looked the other way while millions starved. History demands a verdict on their performance; this book is an attempt to deliver it.

Because so many Westerners consider communism an amoral economic system that is quite separate from the crimes committed by tainted communist dictators, it is important to evaluate communist theory. Only then is it possible to determine the extent to which Stalin complied with and/or violated communist principles. Part Two will delve into Soviet ideology, policy, and practice and prove that Stalin did not deviate from the Marx and Engels playbook to any substantive degree. When it came to the issue of suppressing Ukrainian nationalism, Stalin was actually more faithful to the Marxist vision than Lenin. The use of violence was a legitimate and necessary element of establishing the socialist state. It was therefore inappropriate for Western intellectuals to separate the means from the ends.

Part Three will cover the reaction of Western journalists and intellectuals to the Holodomor. Many notable historians have already focused considerable attention on the Great Famine; Anne Applebaum recently published a worthy contribution to its historiography entitled *Red Famine*. It is unnecessary to rehearse the information from previous works. Rather, this

section will attempt to provide a chronological narrative that includes a brief account of the events that occurred in Ukraine and the processing of those events by Westerners. It will become evident that when truth about the Famine did make its way to the West, it was typically not identified as the consistent outcome of communist ideology. Accurate reports from journalists on the ground were called into question by Western journalists who remained in Moscow and took their cues from the Kremlin. The main thrust will focus on the intellectuals who interacted with the Soviets and sympathized with socialist thought. Many of them actively sought to form relationships with Soviet leadership and subsequently became useful tools for the promotion of communism. Others quietly absorbed the ideology and allowed it to color their contributions to western culture, thereby subtly influencing future generations.

Part Four will address the cost of failing to place the Holodomor within the larger context of Soviet ideology. When intellectual elites appraised the value of a thought system apart from its real-world consequences, society learned that it was not necessary to evaluate a widely held philosophy based on its actual performance. The failure of the West to engage in the ideological war with Stalin and the Soviet Union granted Leftist intellectuals the opportunity to promote an idealized version of communism that was deadly in its inaccuracy. As truth stumbled in the street, so would millions of starving and oppressed peoples. That is the legacy of unwritten history. Without the Holodomor, communism was just a harmless political theory. With it, it became the terror of the twentieth century.

**Part Two**  
**“A Covenant with Death”**

## Chapter 3

### The Problem of the Peasantry

*“...there is only one way in which the murderous death agonies of the old society and the bloody birth throes of the new society can be shortened, simplified and concentrated, and that way is revolutionary terror.”*

- Karl Marx<sup>1</sup>

*“A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon — authoritarian means, if such there be at all; and if the victorious party does not want to have fought in vain, it must maintain this rule by means of the terror which its arms inspire in the reactionists.”*

- Frederick Engels<sup>2</sup>

It was supposed to be inevitable. Mankind was following a predetermined trajectory, moving through successive stages of economic development that brought it ever closer to the culminating event of history: the proletarian revolution. Proletariats would thrust aside the economic antagonisms that had plagued them for centuries and fulfill their destiny. In times past, the bourgeoisie had swept away the ancient feudal order. Soon it would be time for the dictatorship of the proletariat to abolish the power of the bourgeoisie and its capitalistic structure. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels prophesied the coming of this new economic order with absolute certainty.<sup>3</sup>

Marx and Engels were also quite certain that when the Communist Revolution finally came, it would be universal in scope. The proletariat would not seize power in a single country;

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, “The Victory of the Counter-Revolution in Vienna,” *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, No. 136 (November 1848).

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Engels, “On Authority,” in *Marx-Engels Reader*, Marx-Engels Archive.

<sup>3</sup> Communist Manifesto; E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 2* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1966), 11.

it would initiate simultaneous uprisings around the world.<sup>4</sup> This was the only way to accumulate sufficient productive forces to ensure the success of a socialistic economy.

In addition to being inevitable and universal, Marx and Engels' vision of the Communist Revolution was necessarily violent.<sup>5</sup> The bourgeoisie would not relinquish power and possessions without a fight; the proletariat would have to overthrow the ruling elite and seize the means of production by force. Indeed, Marx indicated that the only way to shorten the bloody phase of revolution would be to introduce the tactics of terror.<sup>6</sup>

In 1917, the communist revolutionaries of Russia believed they were fulfilling the prophetic utterances of Marx and Engels. Nevertheless, complications quickly surfaced that required them to make significant adjustments to communist doctrine. First, their revolution did *not* precipitate global uprisings. This was problematic because Russia was not sufficiently industrialized to complete the progression to capitalism, let alone socialism. The success of their revolution rested on the assumption that more advanced nations would undergo their own socialist revolutions. Yet it soon became clear that capitalist nations would not succumb to "historical necessity."<sup>7</sup> This globally inevitable movement proved to be neither global, nor inevitable. Unfortunately, Marx and Engels were painfully accurate in their prediction that the revolution would be violent. That prophecy would be cruelly confirmed time and time again.

It required no great feat of reasoning to conclude that the revolution would be bloody. The most significant feature of communist economic theory was the abolition of private property.<sup>8</sup> Marx and Engels understood that the propertied classes would fiercely oppose collectivization. The proletariat would need to form a "special repressive force" that could

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<sup>4</sup> Frederick Engels, "The Principles of Communism," in *Selected Works Volume I*, Marx-Engels Archive.

<sup>5</sup> Carr, 11.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Marx, "The Victory of the Counter-Revolution in Vienna."

<sup>7</sup> Robert Conquest, 68.

<sup>8</sup> Engels, "The Principles of Communism."

destroy the bourgeois state and seize the means of production. During this transitional period, the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat would maintain order and complete the evolution from capitalism to communism. The use of force was only a temporary expedient. When communist society was firmly established, there would no longer be a need for a coercive state. The people would observe the rules of social life “without force, without compulsion, without subordination, without the special apparatus for compulsion which is called the state.”<sup>9</sup>

Russia never reached this mythical epoch. The Soviet state was conceived in violence, and it was sustained by violence. The reason was simple: the people never grew accustomed to slavery. Always and everywhere were nonconformists who kicked against the goads of totalitarianism. Most of them were peasants. Many of them were Ukrainian. They resisted the overwhelming pressure to comply with Soviet plans until the Soviets secured their compliance through methods of breathtaking cruelty.

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Between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, Ukraine belonged to the Russian Empire.<sup>10</sup> It was a valuable region abounding in fertile fields and natural resources. Despite the existence of a distinct Ukrainian culture and language, its heavy-handed neighbor often swallowed up the Ukrainian identity.<sup>11</sup> Tsarist Russia imposed restrictions on the use of the Ukrainian language and actively encouraged the general Russification of Ukraine.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, a strong national movement flourished in the years that followed the emancipation of the serfs. In the eyes of many patriotic Ukrainians, the Communist Revolution of 1917 presented the ideal opportunity to establish an independent socialist state.

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<sup>9</sup> Vladimir Lenin, “Class Society and the State,” in *State and Revolution*, Modern History Sourcebook.

<sup>10</sup> Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine: Stalin’s War on Ukraine* (New York: Doubleday, 2017), 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.



Vladimir Lenin's initial reaction to Ukrainian independence was overtly hostile. His policy of War Communism (1918-1921) was an immediate, full-scale effort to convert the entire country, including Ukraine, to socialism.<sup>13</sup> Lenin's Bolsheviks took aim at Ukrainian nationalism, banning Ukrainian newspapers, schools, and theaters.<sup>14</sup> In the end, Lenin failed to crush the nationalist impulse within Ukrainian society; his plans to pull Ukraine into the Russian orbit of power were thwarted by fierce resistance from the peasantry.

By 1921, Lenin opted for a strategic retreat. His New Economic Policy (NEP) allowed market forces to operate in Ukraine. Perhaps more importantly, the policy of Ukrainization constituted a major political concession to nationalist elements. From 1923 to 1932, the Soviets lifted the restrictions on Ukrainian language and culture; Ukrainians were free to promote nationalism and to select Soviet leadership from among their own people.<sup>15</sup> Lenin affirmed that all nations had the right to seek their own roads to socialism.<sup>16</sup> Despite his earnest desire for worldwide revolution that transcended national interests, Lenin was willing to settle for a Federation of individual socialist states that retained their cultural autonomy.<sup>17</sup>

While many perceived Lenin's retreat as a violation of communist doctrine, it was actually in line with one of Engels' statements regarding the peasantry. In 1894 he wrote: "We, of course, are decidedly on the side of the small peasant; we shall do everything at all permissible to make his lot more bearable, to facilitate his transition to the co-operative should he decide to do so, and even to make it possible for him to remain on his small holding for a

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<sup>13</sup> Conquest, 48.

<sup>14</sup> Applebaum, 33.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>16</sup> John Mace, *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation*, 1.

<sup>17</sup> Conquest, 33.

protracted length of time to think the matter over, should he still be unable to bring himself to this decision.”<sup>18</sup>

Engels understood that the peasant farmers represented a special case. According to Marxist doctrine, the entire class was doomed to obsolescence wherever capitalism took hold. Considered a vestige of the feudal order, the peasant class did not formally have a place in the Communist Revolution. It was neither bourgeois nor proletarian. As long as it continued to exist, Marx and Engels were compelled to address its role in the socialist cause. In the *Communist Manifesto* they characterized the peasants as conservative and reactionary.<sup>19</sup> The peasants were one economic stage behind, yearning for the private property of the capitalist era while the Communists were intent on collective farming. Engels’ solution was for the agricultural nations of Eastern Europe to grant the peasants temporary rights of ownership. Only then would the peasants be historically prepared to join the proletariat and support the revolution.

These property rights were never intended to become a permanent concession. Marx and Engels insisted that socialism required collective large-scale agriculture.<sup>20</sup> Obviously, the large landowners would be forcefully dispossessed. The small peasants were a different matter.

Earlier in his writings, Engels had muddied the waters considerably by suggesting that Russia might be able to skip the intermediate stage of peasant ownership provided there were concurrent, widespread proletarian revolutions in the West.<sup>21</sup> The *Manifesto’s* dismissive treatment of peasants coupled with Engels’ pendulum swings concerning their economic development conferred a profound sense of ambiguity to the entire subject. It appeared that the communist policy regarding the peasantry was subject to interpretation.

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<sup>18</sup> Frederick Engels, “The Peasant Question in France and Germany,” in *Selected Works*, Marx-Engels Archive.

<sup>19</sup> *Communist Manifesto*.

<sup>20</sup> Carr, 389.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 385.

While Lenin was willing to give Ukrainian peasants time “to think the matter over,” Joseph Stalin was not. With Stalin’s rise to power, Soviet strategy evolved to reflect a theory of Socialism in One Country.<sup>22</sup> Ideologically, communists were still devoted to the Marxist faith, but the exigencies of political reality required an economic plan that focused on the rapid industrialization of Russia alone. In 1928, Stalin expressed his concern that capitalist encirclement threatened Russia’s economic independence: “The question of a fast rate of development of industry would not face us so acutely if we were not the only country but one of the countries of the dictatorship of the proletariat.”<sup>23</sup>

The Soviets certainly could not be accused of economic aptitude; their attempts to industrialize through the nationalization of business produced superficial results simply because of the sheer size of Russian manpower and resources. In reality, Soviet industrial sectors were grossly inefficient due to the lack of genuine market incentives. Yet even inefficient workers needed to eat, and Ukraine was the breadbasket of Russia. Stalin was loath to relinquish control over the fertile lands that could produce two harvests per year.<sup>24</sup> Not only could Ukraine feed the industrial workers of Russia, Stalin believed it could produce enough to bolster Russia’s export market. If capitalist encirclement necessitated the rapid development of industry, Stalin reasoned that it also required the rapid collectivization of agriculture.

In 1929, he embarked on a program that Soviet historian Moshe Lewin described as “audacious to the point of madness.”<sup>25</sup> Engels once suggested that predominantly agrarian nations could effectively bypass the capitalist phase of agriculture provided there were proletarian revolutions taking place in the West. Now Stalin argued that Russia must omit the

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<sup>22</sup> Conquest, 68.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Stalin, “Industrialization of the Country, 1928,” Modern History Sourcebook.

<sup>24</sup> Applebaum, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Moshe Lewin, 446.

capitalist phase precisely *because* there were no proletarian revolutions taking place in the West. The November plenum of the Central Committee echoed his sense of urgency and declared, “The construction of socialism in a country governed by a dictatorship of the proletariat can be carried out with a speed never before known in history.”<sup>26</sup> Most of the agricultural collectivization was to take place in the few short months before the spring sowing.<sup>27</sup> The most complete program of collectivization took place in Ukraine.<sup>28</sup>

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The intensified efforts to collectivize Ukrainian farms met sharp resistance from the peasantry. If NEP and Ukrainization were intended to placate the peasants and win them over to collectivization, they failed. Beginning in December 1929, thousands of communist agents descended on Ukrainian villages with the express purpose of organizing collective farms. These agents were endowed with considerable power from Moscow and used a variety of coercive measures to forcefully persuade the villagers into the collectives.

Miron Dolot described the process as it played out in his own village. Toward the end of December 1929, Communist party officials from the cities arrived. They inspected houses, met with villagers, and even arranged for the installation of a telephone line. In January 1930, they arrested fifteen prominent villagers and evicted their families. After this, the pressure to join the collective farms began in earnest. The villagers were summoned to endless meetings in which party propagandists droned on about the benefits of collective farming. The speakers consistently characterized those who opposed collectivization as “enemies of the people.” Agents then introduced a democratic gloss to the proceedings by taking repeated votes. Interestingly, they never requested that the villagers vote in favor of collectivization. Villagers could only vote

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<sup>26</sup> Lewin, 462.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 469.

<sup>28</sup> Conquest, 220.

“against” the resolutions; raising their hands under those conditions was clearly hazardous to both property and person. By day, the military shot cannon fire over the village. At night, the agents wore down the farmers with propaganda. The choice was clear: either join the collective farm or be banished to the frigid Russian hinterland. One by one, the Ukrainian farmers surrendered their independence to the Soviet agenda. Doubtless, the Communist party tactics were largely responsible for their acquiescence.<sup>29</sup> There was, however, another threat bearing down on the countryside that proved far more convincing to the intransigent peasants: the liquidation of the kulaks.

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<sup>29</sup> Dolot, 4-35.

## Chapter 4

### The Terrible Heritage

Originally, *kulak* referred to a wealthy farmer, but Stalin expanded the meaning of the term to include anyone who opposed collectivization. Indeed, dekulakization was the key to collectivization. It vividly illustrated the fate of any peasant who refused to comply with Soviet demands. With dekulakization, Stalin provided a solution to the great peasant question. Because peasants were neither bourgeois nor proletarian, Engels advocated their gradual integration with the proletariat. He offered no timetable for such a transition, but it is safe to say that this gradual approach exhausted the limits of Stalin's patience. Rather than integrate them as an entire class into the proletariat, Russian communists effectively split them into two classes. The new class identification was not determined by economic circumstances but by the presumed attitude toward the collectives.<sup>1</sup> Only those who were amenable to the communist program could be absorbed into the dictatorship of the proletariat. The rest were condemned as kulaks, subject to the same violent treatment that Marxists reserved for the bourgeoisie.

Lenin's "strategic retreat" encouraged Ukrainian peasants to unify nationally rather than economically. The exposure to free market conditions under NEP brought incentives for farmers to improve their own lot rather than bemoan the class struggle. Communists during Stalin's regime realized that the survival of their revolution required a class struggle, so they manufactured one. Peasants would no longer exist as quasi-members of the proletariat. They were either for the proletariat revolution or against it. The kulaks became the new bourgeoisie,

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<sup>1</sup> Lewin, 494.

and Stalin declared war on these class enemies throughout the empire. Not surprisingly, the greatest numbers of them were “discovered” in Ukraine.<sup>2</sup>

Ivan Klymko’s heart-wrenching account of his own family’s dekulakization on Christmas Eve is representative of a process repeated thousands of times throughout the villages of Ukraine. As was typical for most of these victimized families, activists had already arrested and killed Ivan’s father. They later returned to seize the property.

They carried out all our household goods and loaded them on the sleds. They rounded up the cattle and chickens. Having finished, the head of the village Soviet shouted to his activists: “Why are you standing there? Throw them out the window,” pointing to the children. Then they threw my younger brothers through the window into the snow outside. They grabbed my mother, who had fainted, by the collar and shoved her through the door. The children cried and clung to mother. The activists swore and cursed in filthy language and propelling mother with the gun barrel and kicking the children with their boots along the way they pushed us out of the yard.

My mother and the five children walked away down the street while I, being the oldest, was put on the sled and taken to the nearest station for deportation. That was the last time I saw my loved ones. When I returned from exile in 1941 I located their remains in the cemetery where they were buried after their terrible death in the famine of 1933.<sup>3</sup>

Communist agents showed little mercy, even for young children. Maria Zhadan and her four children were removed from their home in December 1929. With no opportunity to gather warm clothing, they were loaded on a sled and dumped a mile from the village. It was 22 degrees below zero. The snow was knee-deep.<sup>4</sup>

After an activist threw Hryhoriy Norenko’s family out into the snow, he locked the door to the home and announced to the village: “Whoever gives this family shelter will meet a similar fate tomorrow.” Hryhoriy was arrested soon after. The five children, ages two to thirteen, died

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<sup>2</sup> Applebaum, 123, 125.

<sup>3</sup> S.O. Pidhainy, ed., *Black Deeds of the Kremlin: A White Book*, (Detroit: Globe Press, 1955), 178-79.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

from exposure and hunger. The mother disappeared; villagers eventually discovered her dead body near the frozen river.<sup>5</sup>

After sifting through hundreds of similar accounts, students of history may well ask, “To what end?” How could such cruelty serve the communist cause? Yet Stalin’s line of reasoning was quite simple. The collectivization of agriculture was essential to the viability of a socialist economy. Small landowners who refused to join the collective farms thwarted the plans of the proletarian dictatorship; they were rightly considered enemies of the state. Communist doctrine affirmed the use of force as a legitimate means of completing the revolution. Therefore, arresting farmers, seizing their property and forsaking their helpless children were necessary tactics employed by the Soviets to convince other peasants to comply with collectivization. Apologists for the Soviet regime would later argue that without dekulakization, collectivization would have been impossible.<sup>6</sup>

When Lenin’s War Communism came to Ukraine in 1919, authorities confiscated grain at gunpoint.<sup>7</sup> In 1920, the Red Army actually recruited roving bands of poor peasants, the *komnezamy*, to confiscate grain and disarm the kulaks.<sup>8</sup> The People’s Commissar of Food Collection in Ukraine, Alexander Shlikhter, authorized these *komnezamy* to use whatever means they could. Shlikhter also used militarized collection teams to terrorize the peasants and seize their grain.<sup>9</sup> Just one decade later, it was not difficult to resurrect the same methods in the cause of lightning collectivization and dekulakization. Violence was the default mechanism of the Soviet state.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Pidhainy, 483.

<sup>6</sup> Lewin, 447.

<sup>7</sup> Applebaum, 29.

<sup>8</sup> Conquest, 40; Applebaum, 36.

<sup>9</sup> Applebaum, 37.

<sup>10</sup> Lewin, 482-83.



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In Ukraine, Stalin perceived a profound threat to his communist vision. He assumed its militant resistance to collectivization was due to the strong nationalist sentiment. Beginning in 1929, he initiated a purge of the Ukrainian intelligentsia that had been largely responsible for the resurgence of Ukrainian nationalism throughout the 1920s. In 1932, he turned to the peasants. Robert Conquest explained that at that moment, “Stalin seems to have realized that only a mass terror throughout the body of the nation – that is, the peasantry – could really reduce the country to submission.”<sup>11</sup> His weapon of choice was starvation.

The opening scenes of the Holodomor were exceedingly violent. One survivor recalled:

When Dad was in jail, a grain extraction brigade came to our house not less than five times. It was led by Dovhan, who was armed. He would press Mom against the wall, put his revolver against her forehead, then to her heart, then he would walk away, then run up to her again, then press her against the wall with one hand and with the other press the gun against her head, then her chest, and scream in a frenzy: “Confess! Where is the grain pit, or I’ll shoot you!”...Dovhan’s assistants searched for a grain pit, turned everything upside down in our rooms, in the foyer, in the stable, prodding everywhere and everything with pike...they used hammers and pickaxes, but they could find no grain pit. And this infuriated them all the more, particularly Dovhan. To terrify Mom still further, he fired several shots into the walls with his revolver.<sup>12</sup>

Soviet activists accused the peasants of willfully stockpiling socialist property and relentlessly searched for mythical piles of grain. Hanna Banakh remembered coming home one day to find five party officials sitting around the table. Her mother was nowhere to be seen. One of the officials announced, “The villages are full [of grain] and we’ve been sent to collect it.” After they searched the house, Hanna asked them where her mother was. “We locked your mother in the basement,” they told her, “because you won’t give us your grain.” But there was no grain. The family survived on linden leaves and sorrel. When the men finally unlocked the

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<sup>11</sup> Conquest 219.

<sup>12</sup> Volodymyr Taran, letter to Volodymyr Maniak, April 10, 1989. Maniak Collection, Holodomor Research and Education Consortium.

trapdoor to the basement, Hanna found her mother lying on the floor, “all frozen up.” Hanna got to her just in time.<sup>13</sup>

Anne Applebaum records the eyewitness account of an even more violent interaction between peasants and activists:

During the search, the activists asked where was our gold and our grain. Mother replied that she had neither. She was tortured. Her fingers were put in a door and the door was closed. Her fingers broke, blood ran, she lost consciousness. Water was poured over her head, and she was tortured again. They beat her, put a needle under her fingernails...<sup>14</sup>

When the Soviets were satisfied that all of the grain had been seized from the starving peasants, they set to work defending the harvest. Halyna Huba recalled that field guards shot on the spot anyone caught collecting stalks. Unless they were children. Children were merely beaten for stealing socialist property. But sometimes, she noted, they were beaten so severely that they “didn’t even make it home afterwards.”<sup>15</sup>

The chairman of a village soviet in the Poltava district arrested a group of men, women, and children for stealing the “socialist property of the collective farm.” A witness described them as “barefoot, ragged and swollen with hunger; they could hardly move their feet.” The group spent the night in a barn awaiting deportation. Here too, the children were spared the penalty reserved for adults; they died before dawn.<sup>16</sup>

Parents did not always outlive their children, but it was better that they did. As terrible as it was to watch their children die, the most fearsome prospect was to precede their children in death, leaving them to starve alone. This was primarily the experience of mothers; most fathers were either dead or missing by the time the famine reached its height. When faced with the possibility of dying before their children, mothers often took preemptive action. Viktoria

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<sup>13</sup> Banakh..

<sup>14</sup> Applebaum, 226.

<sup>15</sup> Huba.

<sup>16</sup> Pidhainy, 450.

Kaluschny recalled the night her mother brought home a little boy and girl who had been left on the street. Doubtless, their dying mother had left them in a public place in the desperate hope that someone would take them in.<sup>17</sup> This same scenario played itself out time and time again. As the famine intensified, mothers took their children to town and left them there, thinking that perhaps someone would take pity. If they lacked the strength to escort their children, they would verbally send them off. Children as young as seven years old were told, “go and find food for yourself” or even, “save yourself.”<sup>18</sup> These helpless children could no more save themselves than they could stop the Holodomor. The full force of the Communist state was directed against them.

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Both Marx and Engels countenanced the use of force in achieving the revolution of the proletariat. This force was not primarily directed against an invading army or an oppressive government regime. The great class struggle of communism was above all an internal conflict between citizens of the *same nation*, the proletariat versus the bourgeoisie. The *Communist Manifesto* clearly states, “The struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie.”

Marx and Engels opened the door to violence and then promised that it would magically shut when people grew accustomed to following the rules of social life without compulsion. But once they opened the door to violence, it never shut. The proletariat was destined to find an endless supply of enemies and a ceaseless cause for violence. The Holodomor did not constitute a momentary glitch in communist ideology. It was just another step through the open door.

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<sup>17</sup> Viktoria Kaluschny, interview by Ukrainian Canadian Research and Documentation Centre, December 16, 2008, transcript, Holodomor Survivor Documentation Project, London, ON.

<sup>18</sup> Conquest, 287.

In Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, there is an exchange between Ivan and Alyosha that is eerily prescient of what lay ahead for Mother Russia. Just before Ivan tells his now famous story of "The Grand Inquisitor," he sets the stage by detailing horrendous instances of human suffering. Ivan does not bother to relate the suffering of adults because, as he puts it, "they are disgusting and do not deserve love." But children? They are not guilty of anything, and yet they suffer for the sins of others. As Ivan continues his shocking narrative of abuses, Alyosha is visibly shaken. Having pity on his pure and religious brother, Ivan says to him, "I'll stop if you wish." To which Alyosha responds, "Never mind, I want to suffer, too."

Ivan returns to his subject, condemning the injustice of it all and giving vent to his anger with God for allowing it. Then Ivan posits a question that distills the terrible heritage of communism into a single poignant passage:

Imagine that you yourself are building the edifice of human destiny with the object of making people happy in the finale, of giving them peace and rest at last, but for that you must inevitably and unavoidably torture just one tiny creature, that same child who was beating her chest with her little fist, and raise your edifice on the foundation of her unrequited tears – would you agree to be the architect on such conditions? Tell me the truth.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the West stood by and witnessed the construction of such an edifice. Its foundation was built on the unrequited tears, not of one child, but of millions. Their stories, often recorded decades after the fact, offer a tiny glimpse of the unspeakable suffering inflicted by communism. But in the midst of revolutionary violence and suppression, at the very moment when Ukraine reached the very peak of suffering, the stories remained unwritten. The storytellers never found an audience.

The haunting question is: what if they had?

**Part Three**  
**“Darkness for Light”**

## Chapter 5

### The Truth Tellers

In September 1932, twenty-eight year old Rhea Clyman, a Canadian freelance journalist, came face to face with the opening scenes of the Holodomor. In a little Ukrainian village about one hundred miles southwest of Kharkiv, she interviewed the starving peasants of a collective farm. They told her that the previous spring had been very difficult; their children had been reduced to eating grass. Now they were surviving on a scant supply of garden vegetables alone. All of the grain they harvested had been requisitioned. The squash, pumpkins, and potatoes would soon run out; how would they last through the winter? They pleaded, “Tell the Kremlin we are starving; we have no bread!” As if to prove the point, a woman began to remove her children’s clothes. Clyman later described the scene:

She undressed them one by one, prodded their sagging bellies, pointed to their spindly legs, ran her hand up and down their tortured, misshapen, twisted little bodies to make me understand that this was real famine. I shut my eyes, I could not bear to look at all this horror. “Yes,” the woman insisted, and the boy repeated, “they were down on all fours like animals, eating grass. There was nothing else for them.”<sup>1</sup>

Clyman left the village “with the determination that their petition should not only be heard in the Kremlin, but by the rest of the world also.”

Just days before, Clyman and two society girls from Atlanta, Georgia loaded a car with food, supplies, and extra gasoline containers and took off on a 2,500-mile road trip. Over the next four weeks, they traveled through South Russia, Ukraine, the Don Cossack Republic, and the Caucasus. For Clyman, it was more than a simple site seeing tour; it was business. She had lived in Moscow for the past four years working as a freelance journalist for the *London Daily Express* and the *Toronto Evening Telegram*. She wanted to tell her readers how the people of

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<sup>1</sup> Rhea Clyman, *Toronto Evening Telegram*, May 16, 1933.

Russia were faring after fifteen years of communist rule. Earlier travels had taken her north to investigate prison camps and mining towns. Now she turned her attention south, embarking on another daring quest to get the kind of stories that never made it to the foreign correspondents of the Moscow Press Department. While serving as a guide and interpreter for adventurous Americans on tour, she would also be taking notes on the true state of affairs in the Russian countryside. The notes would become the basis for a series of stories on Russia's "Famine-Land."

Traveling without accurate road maps, or paved roads for that matter, into areas widely recognized as unreliable sources of food, fuel, and shelter, the trio witnessed the devastating consequences of Stalin's lightning collectivization. They passed unharvested fields of charred and burnt wheat and thousands of homes left empty from dekulakization. They visited the people; they heard the stories.

Clyman's four-week tour came to an abrupt end in Tbilisi when the Soviet secret police arrested her. The Politburo had issued a resolution on September 17 with the express purpose of removing her from the country. When she returned to Canada, she wrote a series of twenty-two articles for the *Toronto Evening Telegram*. The little-known newspaper did not run the series until the following spring. The story on the starving Ukrainian children was published on May 16, 1933. By then, they were probably dead.<sup>2</sup>

Rhea Clyman effectively "scooped" bigtime news organizations such as the *New York Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*, but the delay in publication meant that her stories appeared in print some six weeks after those of Malcolm Muggeridge and Gareth Jones. In late March 1933, Muggeridge witnessed the height of the famine and sent dispatches back to England in a diplomatic bag. His articles were published anonymously in the *Guardian*. At the same time,

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<sup>2</sup> Jars Balan, "Rhea Clyman" (lecture, Ukrainian Jewish Encounter, Blue Mountain, Ontario, March 25, 2017).

Gareth Jones conducted his “walking tour” through Ukraine and provided accurate reports on the famine for various news outlets, including the *New York Times*.

All three journalists took on their assignments without the knowledge or consent of the Soviet government. It was the only way to reach the truth. Because Jones and Muggeridge wrote for well known, highly reputable western outlets, their articles could challenge the benign perception of communism that Russians had carefully developed among Westerners.

Muggeridge was safe for the time being because his name was not attached to his three-part series printed by the *Guardian* on March 25, 27, and 28. That left Jones to bear the brunt of the Kremlin’s ruthless damage control. Eugene Lyons, a member of the American press corps, later described the unanimous decision to “throw down Jones.” At a meeting with the head censor, Comrade Umansky, American journalists agreed to deny Jones’ version of the famine. The Americans were eager to preserve their access to the highly publicized show trial of British engineers from Metropolitan-Vickers that was set to begin in April. The world would be watching. At this sensitive moment in international relations, accurate coverage of the famine amounted to “professional suicide.”<sup>3</sup>

When Walter Duranty deliberately contradicted Gareth Jones in the pages of the *New York Times* on March 31, 1933, there was no one to defend Jones. Duranty referred to Jones’ reporting on the famine as a “big scare story” based on anecdotes from a “rather inadequate cross-section of a big country.” The implication was clear: the Soviet Union was far too expansive to permit hasty judgments based on brief trips through limited areas. Journalists must present the whole picture, placing the reports of temporary bread shortages within the larger context of the Bolshevik drive toward socialism. It was in this article that Duranty famously asserted, “you can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs.” Gareth Jones’ little vignettes

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<sup>3</sup> Eugene Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia* (London: Harrap and Co. Ltd., 1938), 575-76.



about peasants fishing orange peels and crusts of bread out of spittoons or of children with swollen stomachs crying for bread were side stories. While Jones was busy highlighting the casualties of the Soviet objective, Duranty was reporting on the larger story, “the future of Soviet power, which cannot and will not be smashed.” Duranty acknowledged the seriousness of the food shortage but claimed there was “no actual starvation or deaths from starvation.” Rather, there was “widespread mortality from diseases due to malnutrition.”<sup>4</sup>

Propaganda operatives within and without the Soviet Union were intent on minimizing the impact of human-interest stories. Statistics could be easily manipulated to reflect a desired outcome, regardless of the facts on the ground. But the stories told by Clyman, Muggeridge, and Jones *were* the facts on the ground. They could not be explained away. Soviet sympathizers and propagandists set to work, dismissing the stories as unrepresentative of the bigger picture or condemning them as blatant falsifications. The overall strategy was to defer the stories until their significance vanished in the noble realization of the Soviet vision. According to the crass imagery employed by Duranty, cracked eggshells were only fit for the trashcan.

While acceptance or rejection of the famine largely fell along ideological lines, ideology was not powerful enough to counteract the effects of actually witnessing the event. The stories of Holodomor victims proved so compelling that many Western observers had no choice but to reject their belief in the communist ideal. It was one thing to labor for the glorious revolution of the proletariat in America or Great Britain; it was quite another to see the revolution take shape in the “promised land” of the USSR.

Many Westerners came face to face with the real-world experiences of famine victims. They recognized the connection between communist ends and means. The stories were powerful,

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Duranty, *New York Times*, March 31, 1933.

but they were not told soon enough. The rest of the world came to know a sanitized version of communism with the cracked eggshells quietly swept away.

In 1934, William Henry Chamberlin described the silent suffering of famine victims:

There is something epically and indescribably tragic in this enormous dying out of millions of people, sacrifices on the altar of a policy which many of them did not even understand. The horror of this last act in the tragedy of the individual peasantry is perhaps intensified by the fact that the victims died so passively, so quietly, without arousing any stir of sympathy in the outside world. The Soviet censorship saw to that.<sup>5</sup>

Chamberlin had begun his professional writing career as a socialist. In 1922, he became a Moscow correspondent with the *Christian Science Monitor* and the *Manchester Guardian*, gradually becoming disillusioned with the communist vision. When he witnessed the Holodomor, he denounced communism completely.<sup>6</sup>

Chamberlin viewed the suffering of the famine victims as a silent tragedy. He knew that Western correspondents had been restricted from famine areas; he personally experienced it in August 1933 when he was refused permission to visit Ukraine. In truth, Moscow had restricted journalistic freedom for months. The British ambassador to USSR, Sir Esmond Ovey, reported in March of 1933 that all correspondents were “advised” by the Press Department of the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs “to remain in Moscow.”<sup>7</sup>

Eugene Lyons was among the American journalists who submissively acquiesced to Soviet restrictions while the famine raged. He would later admit that “not a single American newspaper or press agency protested publicly against the astonishing and almost unprecedented confinement of its correspondent in the Soviet capital or troubled to probe for the causes of this extraordinary measure.” Yet the travel ban did not excuse their silence. Lyons conceded that not

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<sup>5</sup> William Henry Chamberlin, *Russia's Iron Age* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1934). 88.

<sup>6</sup> “Guide to the William Henry Chamberlin Papers, 1861-1978,” Providence College Digital Commons, accessed March 19, 2018, <https://digitalcommons.providence.edu>.

<sup>7</sup> Marco Carynnyk, 33.

even a “deaf-and-dumb reporter hermetically sealed in a hotel room” could escape the knowledge of the famine.<sup>8</sup> They were driven to “philological sophistries” that bolstered the Soviet narrative.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps they feared, as in the Metro-Vickers affair, that they might be denied access to more newsworthy items if they dared to opine on the “food shortages” in the countryside.

Lyons pointed to a more ideological motivation. Those who believed in the socialist cause also believed it was necessary to “maintain appearances for the USSR as Utopia-in-construction.” Of course there were broken eggshells, but it was best to conceal them for the sake of the cause. Lyons understood this mindset because he had been infected by it himself. He admitted that he was once prepared “to liquidate classes, purge millions, sacrifice freedoms and elementary decencies, arm self-appointed dictators with a flaming sword – all for the cause.”<sup>10</sup> During his time in Russia, he gradually came to realize that the great fight for economic freedom had only created a new form of slavery. He learned that any movement becomes worthless and dangerous when it throws off the respect for life, liberty, and justice. The most insidious aspect of the Communist Revolution was its contempt for the individual.<sup>11</sup>

The journalists who were sympathetic to the utopian experiment taking place in Russia dared not focus on the individuals. They could make vague references to “heavy loss of life” and “widespread mortality from diseases due to malnutrition,” but they never gave faces to the victims. They never told stories. The reason was simple: communism can only be championed from a distance. The moment these journalists came close enough to see starving and oppressed

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<sup>8</sup> Lyons, 572.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 573.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 647.

<sup>11</sup> Lyons, 646.

*individuals*, their faith in the system began to waver. The same basic formula held true for all of the many political pilgrims who made their way to Russia during the famine years.

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Fred Beal started working in the textile mills of Lawrence, Massachusetts at the age of fourteen. He was drawn to radicalism at a young age, participating in and eventually leading strikes in several mill towns in the North. The Communist Party recognized his potential and recruited him for service, most famously in organizing the Loray Mill workers in Gastonia, North Carolina. In 1929, Beal led the workers in a violent strike that culminated in the shooting death of Police Chief O.F. Aderholdt. Beal and six other men were convicted of second-degree murder. They quickly became Communist Party heroes, and various liberal organizations raised their bail money. Agents in high places arranged for them to skip bail and make a pilgrimage to the utopia of Soviet Russia. Beal spent two years in the “Promised Land,” from 1931 to 1933.

I lived with the Russian workers, most of the time at the great Kharkov tractor plant. I participated in all of the furious strivings of the first Five-Year Plan. I saw the inside wheels of the ponderous Soviet mechanism, and all the little jigs and cams which made the wheels go round. God knows I wanted to be convinced that the Stalin program was a vestibule to that Ideal Society to which I had consecrated my life. Every instinct inclined me to look with tolerant eyes upon the heart-breaking inadequacies and injustices which faced the worker in Russia. But I could not...convince myself that the suffering and futility which I saw everywhere in Stalin-land were but figments of the Capitalist imagination.<sup>12</sup>

In the spring of 1933, he walked through a Ukrainian village that was almost completely devoid of life. Many of the houses were vacant; their former occupants now quietly resting in backyard graves. Some houses were not empty. Beal peered through the windows and saw partially decomposed corpses. He read the signs they left behind. “God bless those who enter here, may they never suffer as we have.” On the door of a home where an elderly couple lay: “My son. We couldn’t wait. God be with you.” One unforgettable scene brought him exceptional

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<sup>12</sup> Fred Beal, “I Was a Communist Martyr,” *The American Mercury* (September 1937), 39.

pain. He saw a dead man, propped up against the wall, with eyes that seemed to stare straight at Beal, accusing him. This man had not died naturally; his death was from a definite cause. “A cause which I was somehow associated with, which I had been supporting.”<sup>13</sup> By the time Beal returned to the United States, “the old faith was dead.” He wrote a book about his experiences entitled *Word from Nowhere: The Story of a Fugitive from Two Worlds*. It was published in 1938, five years after the Holodomor.

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<sup>13</sup> Fred Beal, *Word from Nowhere: The Story of a Fugitive from Two Worlds*, 252.

## Chapter 6

### The Victory of Political Propaganda

*In January food fell short...Starvation seemed to stare them in the face. It was vitally necessary to conceal this fact from the outside world...Once again it was being put about that all the animals were dying of famine and disease, and that they were continually fighting among themselves and had resorted to cannibalism and infanticide. Napoleon was well aware of the bad results that might follow if the real facts of the food situation were known, and he decided to make use of Mr. Whymper to spread a contrary impression.<sup>1</sup>*

- *Animal Farm, George Orwell*

*“The excellent harvest about to be gathered shows that any report of a famine in Russia is today an exaggeration or malignant propaganda.”<sup>2</sup>*

- *Walter Duranty, August 24, 1933.*

While Fred Beal entered the USSR without fanfare and experienced the authentic life of a proletarian in a Ukrainian tractor factory, Edouard Herriot, the former prime minister of France, was treated to a carefully orchestrated subterfuge in late August, 1933. The day before Herriot arrived in Kiev residents were organized at 2 a.m. to begin cleaning the streets and decorating the houses. Rationing centers were closed. Most importantly, the beggars, the starving, and the homeless children were removed.<sup>3</sup> A similar overhaul was performed on a nearby collective farm shortly before an expected visit from Herriot. Clubrooms were thoroughly cleaned and refurbished with furniture from the regional theater. Curtains, drapes, tablecloths, and flowers transformed one wing into a dining hall. Workers were told that a studio from Odessa would be filming a movie at their farm. Authorities chose who would play in the picture and sent the rest of the workers away. In the village, everyone was confined to their homes. The bodies of the dead and the nearly dead were removed from the roadsides. The “actors” were given complete

<sup>1</sup> George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (New York: Penguin Group, 2003), 53.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Duranty, *New York Times*, August 24, 1933.

<sup>3</sup>S.O. Pidhainy, ed., *Black Deeds of the Kremlin: A White Book*, (Detroit, Globe Press, 1955), 92.

sets of new clothing, including socks, shoes, hats, and handkerchiefs. They sat down to tables full of meat and beer in the revamped dining room and enthusiastically played their parts in the meal scene. The true purpose was to enable Herriot to meet “typical” Ukrainian workers during their dinner break. When the visit was cancelled at the last minute, the “director” and his assistant thanked the workers for their performance and reclaimed the clothing, except for the socks and handkerchiefs.<sup>4</sup>

The elaborate deceptions paid off in propaganda windfalls. Indeed, that is why Herriot was invited in the first place. The Soviets intended to use him as an international public relations liaison that would authoritatively contradict previous reports of famine.<sup>5</sup> Herriot did not disappoint. After spending five days in Ukraine, he confidently stated at the station in Kiev that there was no famine. *Pravda* exulted, “E. Herriot told representatives of the press that everything he saw in the USSR was wonderful. He categorically denied the lies of the bourgeois press about a famine in the Soviet Union.”<sup>6</sup>

Herriot’s visit, like Shaw’s in 1931, was highly publicized by the international press and thus immediately absorbed by the international community. Whatever impact the stories told by Clyman, Muggeridge, and Jones had made on the western consciousness was obviated by the music and flowers that Herriot discovered at the clean and orderly children’s home in Kharkov.<sup>7</sup> Stalin was learning that issuing competing narratives through media outlets was just one strategy in the propaganda war. He must also provide competing images. If the West was finding it difficult to champion the communist cause from a distance, Stalin would give them a closer

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 93-94.

<sup>5</sup> Ammende, 244; Applebaum, 308.

<sup>6</sup> *Pravda*, September 13, 1933.

<sup>7</sup> Ammende, 213.

perspective, complete with smiling children and well-dressed peasants. The catch was that it was all a sham.

There were many Western visitors to the Soviet Union during the famine years. Very few were permitted to see the truth. Most of them “succeeded in discovering exactly what they expected and wished to discover.”<sup>8</sup> In the early 1930s, Western intellectuals were inclined to hold benevolent sentiments toward Russia, even more so than during the revolutionary fervor of 1917. Paul Hollander, who has researched and written extensively on intellectual culture, commented on the phenomenon:

It is one of the paradoxes of the attitudes of American as well as other Western intellectuals that they found Soviet society less interesting and less appealing both at the time of the relatively bloodless, but nonetheless dramatic, October Revolution and during the 1920s when more rational and humane attempts were made to reconstruct society, than during the 1930s when Stalinist terror reached its climax, famine raged, and immense hardships resulted from the collectivization campaign.<sup>9</sup>

Hollander explains that the newly adopted Eastern orientation of intellectuals was influenced primarily by circumstances in Western Europe and America and only secondarily by the boisterous changes taking place in Russia.<sup>10</sup> It all came down to timing. The 1920s were marked by material prosperity, and the bohemian culture of intellectuals tended toward hedonism, not politics. With the stock market crash of 1929, intellectuals began to question and then to criticize the status quo. Bankrupt businessmen, unemployed workers, and devastated farmers gave the lie to the abundance and prosperity promised by the free market system. They had all been fooled. As capitalism seemed to disintegrate before their eyes, intellectuals looked to alternate systems of thought and action. Chamberlin wrote that they were fascinated by the

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Western Intellectuals in Search of the Good Society* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2009) 107.

<sup>9</sup> Hollander, 76.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.



Soviet Union because it offered so much that was new and untried in economic and social fields.<sup>11</sup>

However, their political shift ran deeper than the consideration of economic structures. The Depression may have prompted a social crisis among intellectuals because widespread suffering was on their doorstep, but it was the rise of fascism that prompted an existential desperation to act on the behalf of civilization itself. This was the impetus for Whittaker Chambers' journey toward communism. He observed, "a man does not, as a rule, become a Communist because is he attracted to Communism, but because he is driven to despair by the crisis of history through which the world is passing."<sup>12</sup> Western intellectuals regarded Germany's National Socialism with fear and alarm. Their own nations, struggling in the throes of economic depression and compromised by political instability, seemed helpless to meet the threat. American intellectuals urged President Roosevelt to extend diplomatic recognition formally to the USSR. The Soviet Union appeared to be the only staunch opponent of nazism, and intellectuals latched onto communism as a means of taking the offensive in the inevitable war with fascist powers. In the words of Malcom Muggeridge, "Stalin became their antidote to Hitler."<sup>13</sup>

The great and tragic irony is that they honestly believed there was a legitimate distinction between the two. In truth, both were murderous dictators who established their regimes in the name of power and in the contempt of freedom. Vasily Grossman believed that the Russian synthesis of non-freedom and socialism developed by communist leaders was the first step in a much broader march to slavery. The West gazed in fascination at the revolution of the proletariat

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<sup>11</sup> Chamberlin, 265.

<sup>12</sup> Whittaker Chambers, *Witness* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2005), 191.

<sup>13</sup> Hollander, 80-82.

while European nationalists drew inspiration for their own revolutions. “First the Italians and then the Germans began to develop the concept of national socialism in their own ways.”<sup>14</sup>

Yet thinkers and writers who would recoil in horror at the prospect of developing a professional relationship with Adolph Hitler ran unabashedly to Joseph Stalin, eager for the opportunity to mine the depths of his captivating intellect. His interlocutors found him to be knowledgeable on a broad range of subjects with exceptional powers of concentration. The overall perception was that Stalin was “a good man to have power” because he possessed the traits that would preclude the abuse of power. By their reckoning, he was “kindly, simple, good-natured, unpretentious and self-denying.”<sup>15</sup> These generous attributions to Stalin and the glowing reports of Soviet success were of a piece. Stalin was responsible for stunning transformations in Russian society; it was natural to believe that his persona was commensurate with his policies.

Shaw measured Stalin against other world leaders, notably Mussolini and Hitler, and determined that only Stalin was capable of getting things done. “Stalin has delivered the goods to an extent that seemed impossible ten years ago; and I take off my hat to him accordingly.”<sup>16</sup> In a letter to the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, Shaw and other recent visitors to the USSR condemned the British press for its reckless campaign to discredit the Soviet Union. During their visits, Shaw et.al. saw no evidence of deprivation and despair. On the contrary, everywhere they looked they found hopeful and enthusiastic workers, increasing health services, advancements in education, and greater security for children.<sup>17</sup> It is no wonder that just before his departure from

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<sup>14</sup> Grossman, 182-83.

<sup>15</sup> Hollander 170, 173.

<sup>16</sup> George Bernard Shaw, “Further Comments,” in *Stalin-Wells Talk: The Verbatim Record* (London: The New Statesman and Nation, 1934), 47.

<sup>17</sup> Shaw et.al., *Manchester Guardian*, March 2, 1933.

Russia in 1931 he pronounced, “Tomorrow I leave this land of hope and return to our Western countries of despair.”<sup>18</sup>

Stalin sensed the alienation that Western intellectuals felt toward their native countries and manipulated it to serve his purposes. Because he understood the powerful human desire for self-confirmation and attention, he arranged VIP tours and indulgent interviews to win their allegiance.<sup>19</sup> The kindness and consideration he routinely withheld from his own people was lavishly bestowed on politically useful foreigners who were conditioned to see exactly they wanted to see in Stalin’s Russia.

In 1933, the Depression was raging, Hitler was consolidating his power, and the United States established diplomatic recognition of Stalin’s communist regime in Russia. In 1933, ideologically opposed journalists duked it out in the newspapers over the veracity of famine reporting while celebrities of the political and intellectual world took guided tours of Potemkin villages and wrote glowing reviews of their experiences. In 1933, 3.5 million men, women, and children starved to death by order of Russia’s communist government, and Fred Beal walked through one of their empty villages where the houses served as tombs.<sup>20</sup>

In 1933, the Holodomor did not register in the collective consciousness of the West. We knew about Stalin. We knew about communism. We did not know about the mother who softly kissed her dead baby on a train headed for the Ukrainian interior.<sup>21</sup> The stories came too little and too late. The Soviet Union succeeded in concealing the famine until it came to an end,

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<sup>18</sup> George Bernard Shaw, *The Rationalization of Russia* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1964), 31.

<sup>19</sup> Alexander Riley, “On How and Why Intellectuals Deceive Themselves: A Paul Hollander Retrospective,” *Society* 54, no. 6 (December 2017): 569.

<sup>20</sup> Applebaum, 280.

<sup>21</sup> Dolot, 185. Indeed, no one would know about her until Miron Dolot published his memoirs of the famine in 1985.

forever removing it from its ideological context.<sup>22</sup> All the while, intellectuals continued to nod approvingly at the development of the evil empire and in so doing, exchanged darkness for light.

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<sup>22</sup> Lyons, 577.

## **Part Four**

**“They Have Made Their Paths Crooked”**

## Chapter 7

### The Legacy in the West

*With a great eagerness the women waited for the coming riot to begin... We wanted to fight... the mood of a great portion of the crowd was hilarious, not serious... The riots were a real expression of frustration... although it had little to do with overthrowing the government... the pigs represented an authority that was restrictive and one-sided... We had a women's meeting after the riot, and it was full of electric energy. It was so high... Nothing but action, running in the streets, actually fighting with the pigs could have released such a pent-up force... Eyes glowing we looked at each other warmly.<sup>1</sup>*

- Susan Stern

*Brandishing pitch forks, poles and rocks they drove off the active, broke down the doors of the grain sheds and began filling their sacks... In about fifteen minutes several dozen armed mounted militiamen appeared at the scene of the trouble. The chief dismounted and ordered the women to cease their rebellion and go home... The women all waited for Nastya to make the first move. She appeared at the front of her group and quietly stated, "We are starving and will not leave. This is our grain you Russian robbers are keeping from us."*

*The chief ordered his men to open fire. Nastya was the first to fall. Many others were killed and many more wounded... Many of the women who survived the shooting were later arrested for the unforgivable crime of taking a little of their own grain to feed their starving children.<sup>2</sup>*

- Hryhoriy Kostiuik

In a world that observes absolute standards of right and wrong, open acts of repression are unmistakable and universally condemned. The murder of innocent people, the seizure of their property, and the starving of their families constitute criminally oppressive measures that invite international censure. But when truth becomes relative and repression remains hidden, there is no widespread expression of outrage. Democratic nations turn their attention to domestic concerns, oblivious to the masses who are suffering under despotic regimes. And so it was, that as time and space separated the secure and affluent West from the apprehension of totalitarian abuses in the East, Western perceptions of "repression" took a decidedly subjective turn. In the 1960s and

<sup>1</sup> Susan Stern, *With the Weathermen: The Personal Journey of a Revolutionary Woman* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 76-79.

<sup>2</sup> Pidhainy, 398-99.

70s, the younger generation came to equate repression with any demand imposed from the outside, as well as any limitation of individual desires.<sup>3</sup> The term did not evoke visions of a ruthless police state so much as the everyday constraints associated with living in a democratic society. Student radicals believed that everything from the nuclear family to the workplace to correct spelling could be properly labeled as “repressive.”<sup>4</sup> As one member of this supposedly oppressed class asserted, “Hell is growing up in Scarsdale.”<sup>5</sup>

In this environment of cultural upheaval, college protesters brazenly directed their foul language and insulting gestures at policemen without fear of reprisal.<sup>6</sup> The irony is that their demonstrations were not aimed at achieving any specific goals; they were merely an expression of a nebulous dissatisfaction with the “Establishment.”<sup>7</sup> It was protest for the sake of protest.

Many recognized a dangerous ideological basis for the generational turmoil: the resurgence of Marxism. Yet the Marxism of the 1960s was a secondhand version that went through considerable interpretations, modifications, and adaptations by the time it became a major source of inspiration for student radicals.<sup>8</sup> This revised Marxism was a muddled amalgam of symbols, slogans and heroes. Nevertheless, it provided a semblance of ideological pedigree to the scrambled logic and imprecise demands of 1960s-era political activism. It also provided the elements of passion, protest, polemic, and denunciation that appealed to a generation eager to pass judgment on its predecessors.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Edward Shils, *Intellectuals and the Powers and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 275; Roland N. Stromberg, *After Everything: Western Intellectual History Since 1945* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 240.

<sup>4</sup> Hollander, 181.

<sup>5</sup> Robert H. Bork, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline* (New York: Regan Books, 1997), 23.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Coles, “A Policeman Complains,” *New York Times Magazine*, June 13, 1971.

<sup>7</sup> Hollander, 186.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

Older Americans had always feared the threat of communist influence on their children. In 1949, JB Matthews wrote a piece for the *American Legion Magazine* entitled, “The Commies Go After the Kids.” The article purported to uncover the many and varied devices that the Young Communist League and other leftist organizations were utilizing in their effort to “win over and indoctrinate our children.” Among the many avenues of communist infiltration cited by Matthews were children’s record clubs, summer camps, drama clubs and school textbooks. To the contemporary ear, Matthews’ arguments are less than compelling. Certainly, there was a concerted focus on the part of the extreme left to influence children, yet Matthews did not provide any solid examples of propaganda that went beyond the relatively innocuous theme of “class struggle.” One his major targets, the Young People’s Record Club, was an organization he believed to be filled with communists. Yet he only cited one example from the club, a song intended for children ages 2 to 6 entitled “Building a City.” His chief objection to the song was that while it highlighted the contributions of proletarian laborers like carpenters and painters, it failed to mention “manufacturers, construction companies, bankers, architects, draftsmen, or capitalist enterprisers.”<sup>10</sup>

Julia Mickenberg asserts that the main shortcoming of Matthews’ article was that the subject of children’s literature was almost entirely absent.<sup>11</sup> In *Learning from the Left: Children’s Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States*, Mickenberg makes the case that Cold War era leftists entered the mainstream publication world as children’s authors, subtly influencing the next generation to embrace the issues of social justice, racial equality, and economic parity. She stops short of crediting these authors as the direct instigators

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<sup>10</sup> J.B. Matthews, “The Commies Go After the Kids,” *The American Legion Magazine* 47, no. 6 (December 1949).

<sup>11</sup> Julia L. Mickenberg, *Learning from the Left: Children’s Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 36.



of the rebellions of the 1960s. Nevertheless, she posits a connection between the two generations.

The young people in their teens and twenties who joined the Civil Rights movement and called themselves the “New Left,” who protested the Vietnam War, who formed consciousness-raising groups, and who imagined a kind of “liberation” for their own children through books like *Free to Be You and Me* (1974) had grown up in an age marked by conformity and the repression of dissent. Yet they also managed to find material promoting interracial friendship, critical thinking, “science for the citizen,” and a “working-class Americanism”...The books that members of the Communist Left wrote, edited, illustrated, and sold in these years were by no means revolutionary or even political, especially by today’s standards. But the politics are nearly invisible today in part because these books, and the people who wrote, illustrated, edited, and disseminated them, helped to change the basic assumptions about what children ought to read.<sup>12</sup>

It is likely that Mickenberg overstates the leftist leanings of some of the authors included in her sample.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, she assigns a surprising level of leftist influence over a Civil Rights movement that was strongly supported by the Right, often in larger proportions than that of the Left.<sup>14</sup> She suggests that the 1972 children’s entertainment project, *Free to Be You and Me* was developed in reaction to the “conformity and the repression of dissent” that characterized the post-World War II era. Setting aside the fact that even a cursory review of global history renders the reference to repression contextually absurd, the contention that *Free to Be You and Me* had some sort of connection to communist children’s authors leaves the impression that gender

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<sup>12</sup> Mickenberg, 276.

<sup>13</sup> Lisa Jacobsen, review of *Learning from the Left* by Julia L. Mickenberg, *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (October 2007), 1213.

<sup>14</sup> For example, the voting record on the Civil Rights Act of 1964 reveals that a higher percentage of Republicans in both the House and Senate voted in favor of the act as compared to their Democrat counterparts. See <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/88-1964/h182> and <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/88-1964/s409>. The less eulogized Civil Rights Acts of 1957 reveals an even stronger correlation between Republicans and racial justice; not a single Republican in the Senate voted against it. See <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/85-1957/h42> and <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/85-1957/s75>.

equality (a major theme of the book and the subsequent album) is somehow the unique contribution of the Left.<sup>15</sup>

Matthews and Mickenberg, although separated by the space of five decades, both claimed that communist elements attempted to manipulate Western social structure by influencing children. But by including broad ranges of content, they both proved too much. If communist infiltration is evidenced by children's songs that mention carpenters but not bankers and by children's books about little boys who want to play with baby dolls, it would seem that the communist agenda encompasses a breadth of politically pregnant social cues that is impossible to combat. The overall effect is to reduce the Western perception of communism/socialism to a series of sideshow debates about inclusion and equality.

Indeed, Young Democratic Socialists of America (YSDA) does not require its members to adopt any particular ideology "beyond a commitment to feminism and an opposition to racism, imperialism, homophobia, transphobia and, of course, capitalism."<sup>16</sup> At a recent meeting of the YDSA chapter at Blake High School, students recited a quote from Assata Shakur: "It is our duty to fight for freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love each other and we must support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains."<sup>17</sup> Shakur was a member of the Black Liberation Army (BLA) who was convicted of the murder of a New Jersey State trooper. After breaking out of prison with the assistance of the BLA, she received political asylum in Cuba. Undoubtedly the small enclave of student socialists from Tampa, Florida who are anti-sexist,

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<sup>15</sup> In the interest of full disclosure I must admit that as a child, I frequently listened to a *Free to Be You and Me* record that was given to me as a gift. Any intended leftist indoctrination was lost on me. During the 1984 presidential election, I identified with the Republican party and wrote a letter of support to Ronald Reagan. I was ten years old.

<sup>16</sup> Rebecca Stoner, "Behind the Explosion in Socialism Among American Teens, *In These Times*, February 14, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

anti-racist, anti-imperialist, anti-homophobic, and anti-capitalist have no intention of bombing, killing, or robbing anyone; they just like to quote people who do.

Similarly, the raging radicals of the Sixties were not in favor of gulags or purges per se, but they enjoyed wearing their Che Guevara T-shirts just the same. One Cuban exile reacted to the Western youth's romanticized image of communist revolutionaries:

I'd loved to have seen those Sorbonne and Berkeley and Berlin student protesters with their 'groovy' Che posters try their 'anti-authority' grandstanding in *Cuba* at the time. I'd love to have seen Che and his goons get their hands on *them*. They'd have gotten a quick lesson about the 'fascism' they were constantly complaining about—and firsthand. They would have quickly found themselves sweating and gasping from forced labor in Castro's and Che's concentration camps, or jabbed in the butt by 'groovy' bayonets when they dared slow down and perhaps getting their teeth shattered by a 'groovy' machine-gun butt if they adopted the same attitude in front of Che's militia as they adopted in front of those campus cops.<sup>18</sup>

No, Western intellectuals and their impressionable pupils did not and do not become communist sympathizers because of an excess of exposure to socialist history. The more plausible explanation for the idealization of socialist principles is not pervasive indoctrination but rather a dearth of information regarding Marxism and its consequences. Western intellectuals' simultaneous rejection of the American system and ignorant fascination with Soviet Russia in the 1930s was no anomaly. There is a recurring pattern among most intellectuals "to be rather harsh on their own societies, and surprisingly indulgent of as well as uninformed about others."<sup>19</sup> This is reflected in Jeffery Mirel's assessment of a prominent American History textbook. Mirel, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at the University of Michigan, determined that the work was fundamentally unbalanced and concluded, "it is difficult to judge a book as even-handed and fair that devotes so much time to violations of people's civil liberties [in the

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted by Michael J. Totten, "The Truth About Che Guevara, [worldaffairsjournal.org](http://worldaffairsjournal.org), February 7, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Hollander, 3.

U.S.] . . . but does not even mention the millions of deaths under Soviet Communism.”<sup>20</sup> Herbert Foerstel maintains that history textbooks often lack original source material and notoriously avoid footnotes. Consequently, “their historical claims are often little more than unsupported statements intended to accommodate pressure groups and facilitate state adoption.”<sup>21</sup>

The net effect of all of this is to produce history classrooms in which students experience little to no interaction with primary source material. If by some unlikely happenstance students are introduced to Marxist dictatorships, they certainly do not read archived *New York Times* articles or excerpts from *The Black Deeds of the Kremlin*. More likely, they emerge from their public school education with a marked ignorance of the dynamics of socialism and a vague distaste for democratic republics.

Unless they read *Animal Farm*.

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In her foreword to the centennial edition of the George Orwell classic, Ann Patchett remarked on the extraordinary influence the little book had on generations of young Western readers.

When he finished *Animal Farm* in 1943, a publisher was almost impossible to find. A book that so clearly vilified Stalin was unthinkable, as it was Stalin who held the line against the Germans and so became our ally in the Second World War. It would be another decade before England and America recognized the atrocities of that regime, atrocities Orwell had already played out with pigs who ordered dogs to slaughter suspicious chickens and sheep. Somehow the small world around the barn managed to evoke the chill of the murder of millions while seeming to predict the fate of humanity. How did such a radical book wind up in my hands as a sixth grader? How does it wind up in the hands of *every* sixth grader?<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Diane Ravitch, *A Consumer's Guide to High School History Textbooks* (Washington, DC: Fordham Institute, 2004), 35.

<sup>21</sup> Herbert N. Foerstel, *Studied Ignorance: How Curricular Censorship and Textbook Selection Are Dumbing Down American Education* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2014), 92.

<sup>22</sup> Ann Patchett, foreword to *Animal Farm*, by George Orwell (New York: Harcourt Brace, 2003), vi-vii.

Orwell wrote *Animal Farm*, as well as the rest of his serious work after 1936, as a protest against totalitarianism. It was, he explained, “the first book in which I tried with full consciousness of what I was doing, to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole.”<sup>23</sup> Orwell delivered a scathing indictment of communist policy and practice in a simple and concise format easily accessible to millions of Western schoolchildren. Subtitled *A Fairy Story*, *Animal Farm* is the tale of animals under the leadership of two pigs who revolt against Mr. Jones and gain control of Manor Farm. It is an allegory of the Russian Revolution, complete with a leadership schism, rapid industrialization, a ministry of propaganda, political purges, and even a severe famine and its subsequent cover-up. The symbolic content of the work is unmistakable; it is nearly impossible to study *Animal Farm* without addressing Orwell’s intention in writing the book. It has been a standard of assigned reading in literature classes for decades. Renaissance Learning’s 2018 edition of “What Kids Are Reading” reports that *Animal Farm* is still among the highest-rated book picks, maintaining a solid popularity ranking even when compared to contemporary bestsellers such as *Twilight* and *Insurgent*.<sup>24</sup>

While *Animal Farm* is no longer “a red flag shot out toward fascist regimes,” it continues to serve as “an introduction to fascism and totalitarianism.”<sup>25</sup> One sixty-something Baby boomer still remembers a lesson he learned back in high school. One day the teacher drew a circle on the board and traced his finger clockwise from the top of the circle to the bottom, explaining it as the path from democracy to Fascism. Then starting at the top once more, he traced his finger counterclockwise to the bottom of the circle, indicating the path to Communism. “I’ll never forget that circle,” the former student recalled. “It didn’t matter which direction you went, both

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<sup>23</sup> C.M. Woodhouse, introduction to *Animal Farm*, by George Orwell (New York: Harcourt Brace, 2003), xxix.

<sup>24</sup> “What Kids Are Reading: 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition,” Renaissance Research, accessed March 29, 2018, [https://www.renaissance.com/learning-analytics/wkar/?\\_ga=2.59045421.1450060461.1522320473-1958823414.1522320473](https://www.renaissance.com/learning-analytics/wkar/?_ga=2.59045421.1450060461.1522320473-1958823414.1522320473).

<sup>25</sup> Patchett, xii.

paths ended in dictatorships.”<sup>26</sup> This high school student of the late 1960s was never required to take a course in World History. Ironically, he learned about communism while studying *Animal Farm* in English class.

Orwell would have given hearty agreement to the teacher’s chalkboard circle. He was well aware that the political labels of Left and Right became illusory distinctions when both sides moved to the extreme. The intellectuals who shuddered at the specter of Nazism were quite at ease as they witnessed the ascendance of communism, yet Orwell was able to identify the striking resemblance between Germany and Russia. “The two régimes,” he wrote in 1940, “having started from opposite ends, are rapidly evolving towards the same system — a form of oligarchical collectivism.”<sup>27</sup> Orwell was mystified by the socialist intellectuals who wanted the State to become all-powerful, who were all too willing to accept dictatorship and violence. He expected them to value liberty above all else, but as it turns out, they preferred to champion the abolition of private property.<sup>28</sup>

Orwell remained a committed socialist for the rest of his life, maintaining that British socialism provided the best hope for the future. If it could be established apart from a revolutionary context, he argued, humanitarian socialism could reverse the shortcomings of capitalism. Orwell believed the major pitfall of socialism was its tendency to engender revolution, and revolution quickly degenerated into violence and abuse. “A revolution” he wrote in his diary in 1940, “starts off with wide diffusion of the ideas of liberty, equality etc. Then

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Flora, interview by author, Milmay, NJ, March 25, 2018.

<sup>27</sup> George Orwell, review of *The Totalitarian Enemy* by F. Borkenau, *Time and Tide*, May 4, 1940.

<sup>28</sup> George Watson, “Orwell and the Spectrum of European Politics, *Journal of European Studies* 1, no.3 (September 1, 1971), 194, 196.

comes the growth of an oligarchy which is as much interested in holding on to its privileges as any other governing class.”<sup>29</sup>

Francis Schaeffer made much the same point with regard to communism’s articulation of idealistic goals, but blamed the descent to dictatorial excess on the materialist underpinnings of Marxist thought, not the exigencies of revolution. He observed that Marx “reached over to that for which Christianity *does* give a base – the dignity of man – and took the words as words of his own.” Schaeffer considered communism to be a form of Christian heresy that used the idealistic language of dignity and rights to attract converts until it gained control. Once it became the dominant power structure in a government, dignity and rights became meaningless aspirations without any basis in the materialistic foundations of socialism.<sup>30</sup>

Socialists are loath to admit that communism is diametrically opposed to a belief in God and absolute truth. Yet the indisputable lesson of history is that it is not possible to reconcile Christianity and communism.

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Vissarion Belinsky was a nineteenth century Russian literary critic and radical who profoundly impacted the course and direction of socialism in his country. Although he converted to the “new Christianity” of French Utopian Socialism in 1841, it did not take long for him to reject his belief in God. For him, socialism completely supplanted the Gospel. In 1845 he wrote that “in the words *God* and *religion* I see darkness, gloom, chains and the knout, and now I like these two words as much as the four following them.” Dostoevsky biographer Joseph Frank

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<sup>29</sup> Watson, 194.

<sup>30</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 215.

identifies Belinsky's turn against religion as the moment when atheism and socialism were fused into an inseparable alliance in Russia.<sup>31</sup>

Fyodor Dostoevsky's association with Belinsky, from 1845 to Belinsky's death in 1848, convinced him that the only intellectually honest and self-consistent form of socialism was atheistic socialism.<sup>32</sup> This he could not accept. Dostoevsky understood that "socialists go no further than the belly," attempting to solve the problems of humanity with material remedies alone.<sup>33</sup> The finest articulation of the incongruity between communism and Christianity appeared in his final novel. Describing the decision-making process that brought Alyosha to the monastery, he wrote:

As soon as he reflected seriously and was struck by the conviction that immortality and God exist, he naturally said at once to himself: "I want to live for immortality, and I reject any halfway compromise." In just the same way, if he had decided that immortality and God do not exist, he would immediately have joined the atheists and socialists (for socialism is not only the labor question or the question of the so-called fourth estate, but *first of all the question of atheism, the question of the modern embodiment of atheism, the question of the Tower of Babel built precisely without God, not to go from earth to heaven but to bring heaven down to earth [emphasis added]*).<sup>34</sup>

Constrained by the ethical dictates of Christianity, socialism could not forcibly change the economic life of the people. But when stripped of any possible recourse to ultimate truth and morality, atheistic socialism was free to use any means necessary to achieve its goals.

Dostoevsky asked, "But how will a man be after that? Without God and the future life? It means everything is permitted now, one can do anything?"<sup>35</sup> The answer, of course, was "Yes." In the heady days of the Sixties and Seventies, radicals welcomed this liberating message and believed they could use it to chart a course for a more progressive future. What they failed to see

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<sup>31</sup> Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2012), 120-21.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>33</sup> Daniel Lattier, "Dostoevsky's Critique of Socialism," *Intellectual Takeout*, February 9, 2016, accessed March 30, 2018.

<sup>34</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York: Everyman's Library, 1992), 26.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 589.



was that the atheistic basis of the Marxist agenda was the selfsame impulse that once kept the guillotine in ceaseless service in the streets of Paris and the cattle cars continually filled with human cargo bound for Auschwitz. It is incredibly naïve to assume that the unlimited potential of man always leads to a fairy tale ending.

Student protestors of the Sixties believed that the wide scale rejection of authority would set them free from repression. They reveled in the vast array of existing philosophical/religious components from which they could cobble together a syncretistic worldview of their own making. They did not discover truth; they manufactured it, conveniently sidestepping the inconvenient facts of history that contradicted their ideology. But a system that is cut loose from real world human experience is a counterfeit system. Jean Baudrillard would later describe the postmodern simulation of belief systems as drawing a map without first surveying the land. In the process of setting themselves free from socially repressive rules regarding private property, gender roles, sexual conduct and proper spelling, radicals set themselves free from reality. For them, the map preceded the territory.

A quote from Bruce Franklin, a leading campus radical at Stanford, illustrates how his generation's preoccupation with constructing the future led them to depreciate the value of history:

This planet, literally rolling in the heavens, is potentially the paradise imagined in most of our religions. We now confront the last class of men who claim to hold this planet as their own private property and who force the majority of us to toil... *We live in the early dawn of human history*, when we can see the possibility of communism – a world of peace, abundance, creativity, and freedom[emphasis added].<sup>36</sup>

Here Franklin clearly betrays a Marxist view of history, describing the inevitable decline of capitalism that will take place as humanity progresses toward the ideal system of communism.

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<sup>36</sup> Howard Bruce Franklin, *Back Where You Came From: A Life in the Death of the Empire* (New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1975), 219.

The compelling feature of Franklin’s statement is the assertion that he was living “in the early dawn of human history.” The only possible way to equate communism with peace and freedom was to disregard historical evidence. He drew the map of “a world of peace, abundance, creativity, and freedom” under communism. The problem was that no such territory existed.

Jerry Rubin, a social activist from the same era, wrote, “We want to be heroes, like those we read about in history books. We missed the first Amerikan [*sic*] Revolution. We missed World War II. We missed the Chinese and Cuban Revolutions.”<sup>37</sup> The suggestion is that each conflict involved the liberation of oppressed peoples by “heroes.” Given the chance, young Jerry would have participated in all of them, which reveals an astonishing lack of contextual discrimination. What history book gave him the impression that George Washington, Dwight Eisenhower, Mao Zedong, and Fidel Castro were all heroes cut from the same cloth? It was not a declaration based in historical truth, but a rhetorical device intended to blur the lines between competing ideologies and ignore the historical data that separates heroes from villains.

It is highly unlikely that Susan Stern ever heard of Nastya Denysenko, the leader of a little-known women’s revolt that took place in the spring of 1933 in the Poltava region of Ukraine. Nastya’s riot was not merely an “expression of frustration” like the one Susan took part in nearly four decades later. The women in Nastya’s village were starving to death. They were watching their children starve to death. But there were two sheds in the village that were filled with grain from the collective farm. The women of the village knew it was *their* grain, but it was not for them. Amazingly, the abolition of private property had not ushered in the abundance that Bruce Franklin would later associate with the advent of communism. Armed with pitchforks, poles, and rocks, Nastya and her comrades broke into the sheds to reclaim the property that had

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<sup>37</sup> Jerry Rubin, *Do It* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 87.

been taken from them. The authorities, fortified by their conviction that class enemies must be repressed, opened fire and left Nastya dead from a gunshot wound at the age of eighteen.

Repression has proven to be a highly elastic term. The comparison between the repression of Nastya and the repression of Susan is not intended to suggest that lesser claims to authoritarian abuse are always rendered meaningless because someone somewhere has always suffered more. The fact that some people have experienced the total confiscation of their property does not negate the right of others to protest onerous taxation. But when members of a democratic republic justify their participation in violent demonstrations against perceived repression while simultaneously promoting the political philosophy of oppressive regimes, they are literally screaming for a history lesson they were never taught.

## Conclusion

### Wisdom Is Vindicated by Her Children

What happens when history is unwritten? In the case of the Holodomor, an entire generation missed a crucial lesson concerning the logical outcome of communism. As tempting as it is to believe that promoters of Marxist thought infiltrated the West with the purpose of indoctrinating students and intellectuals, the evidence suggests otherwise. Ignorant of communism's terrible heritage, Westerners accepted a romanticized version of the ideology. With famine, confiscation, and murder excised from the record, communism became eminently compatible with the predilections of the Left. Westerners did not know too much; they knew too little. They were not indoctrinated; they were ignorant. The consequence of this ignorance was a detachment from historical reality. Students and intellectuals only knew indulgent caricatures of murderous dictators, their regimes, and their philosophies.

The sad lesson of the hidden Holodomor is that historically challenged societies draw inaccurate conclusions regarding particular ideologies, and they become vulnerable to the evil repetitions of history. Therefore, it is extremely important for historians to write the history of a particular event *immediately* so that it can be connected to its philosophical origins. And of course, every effort must be made to ensure that the history is true and complete. It is the responsibility of historians to evaluate contemporary records and eyewitness testimonies, to separate the wheat from the chaff with regard to journalistic contributions, and to remain beyond the influence of propaganda. Accurate history is the strongest antidote to the spread of toxic doctrines because it exposes them for what they are.

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Once upon a time in human history, philosophy was “the handmaiden of theology.” But long ago, philosophy freed itself from God. In this state of autonomy, it unleashed all manner of untenable thought systems that are inconsistent with man’s actual experience of the world. In his book, *The God Who Is There*, Francis Schaeffer explained that the goal of every preacher of the gospel is to bring man to a point of tension whereby he must face the logical conclusion of his presuppositions. If he is honest, he will inevitably realize that he cannot live with what he professes; it does not speak to the whole of his humanity, what Schaeffer calls the “mannishness of man.” When all the facts of his life are examined, not merely the events but the thoughts and passions that accompanied them, he is able to determine whether his chosen system of thought provides an adequate mooring for his existence *and* his essence.<sup>1</sup>

It is possible to expand on Schaeffer’s thought, to bring philosophy itself to a point of tension and drive it to its logical conclusion by identifying the real-world consequences it has produced. This can only be done by writing its history. For too long the history of socialist thought has been romanticized and idealized, bereft of the type of scrutiny that historians have lavished on men like Christopher Columbus and Thomas Jefferson or events like the Crusades and the Holocaust. Marxism, Socialism, Communism - intellectuals may delineate fine lines of separation between them – but they all involve a materialistic worldview that aims for the belly, not the soul...and winds up starving both.

During his opening address at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trial, US Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson said that there are some wrongs so devastating “that civilization cannot tolerate their being ignored because it cannot survive their being repeated.”<sup>2</sup> What was true of

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* in *The Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy*, 1-202 (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 129-135.

<sup>2</sup> Robert H. Jackson, Opening Address for the United States, Nuremberg War Crimes, November 21, 1945.

the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime is no less true for the horrors committed in Stalin's Russia.

Whittaker Chambers once wrote, "Man cannot organize the world for himself without God; without God man can only organize the world *against man*."<sup>3</sup> Communism was a system built without God and against man. It swallowed both in a torrent of lies. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, himself a survivor of the Soviet Gulag, likened the successive waves of arrest, torture, and imprisonment to a sewage disposal system. Its history was, "an endless swallow and flow" and his attempt to write that history was, "incomplete, meager, miserly, and limited." He regretted not being unable to tell the story in its entirety and dedicated his book, "to all those who did not live to tell it." He sought forgiveness, "for not having seen it all nor remembered it all, for not having divined all of it."<sup>4</sup>

And there was, and is, still so much to tell. Solzhenitsyn focused his historical research on the Gulag. Conquest and Graziosi, on the *Holodomor*. But there are countless rivers of Soviet suffering, all proving that "man without mysticism is a monster."<sup>5</sup> When the history is left unwritten, the rivers fork and spread and swallow up entire nations. Ukraine was one of them.

We can only imagine how history might have been different if the storytellers of the *Holodomor* had found an audience when it mattered most. If the plight of Ukrainian mothers desperately searching for food to keep their children alive had registered in the collective consciousness of the West, perhaps the mothers in China and Cuba and North Korea and Venezuela would not have to watch their own children suffer today.

Perhaps.

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<sup>3</sup> Chambers, 83.

<sup>4</sup> Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), Dedication page.

<sup>5</sup> Chambers, 83.

The fight to convey accurate history is worth a perhaps. Indeed, it is the burden of every honest historian to delve into the wounds of the past and to write them down. They do this with the hope that in reading about Maria and Hanna and Nastya, the current generation may suffer too; suffer enough to vow that such a history will not be repeated.

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