

The man-made Ukrainian famine:



"First comes the gnawing, twisting pain in the stomach. Then hallucinations which drive some mad. Then apathy, emaciation, and

by Ken Shipka

This past year, thousands of Ukrainians across Canada rallied to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the largest man-made famine in human history: the 1932-33 Ukrainian famine.

On October 23, 1983, thousands of Edmontonians gathered at City Hall for the unveiling of a plaque in remembrance of the estimated 7 million famine victims. Among the people attending the ceremony were Premier Peter Lougheed, Mayor Lawrence Decore, National Defence Minister Jean-Jacques Blais, MP's, MLA's, city aldermen, and representatives from 14 ethnic community groups.

Dr. Bohdan Krawchenko, Assistant Director of Ukrainian Studies for the University of Alberta, was the keynote speaker at this rally. Professor Yar Slavutych, a famine survivor who has taught at the U of A for the past 23 years, laid the wreath for those murdered in the famine, including his grandparents and baby sister.

The ceremony was followed by a "hungry dinner" at the Edmonton Convention Centre where U of A President Myer Horowitz was the guest speaker. More recently, Conservative leader Brian Mulroney spoke to 8,000 Ukrainians in Toronto who also rallied to remember the victims of this tragedy.

What Was The Artificial Ukrainian Famine?

In 1932-33, a devastating man-made famine occurred in a region commonly known as the "breadbasket of Europe." Massive starvation obliterated one-quarter of the entire Ukrainian population, at least 3 million of which were small children.

Starvation — which has been called the slowest, most painful and most dehumanizing deaths known to man, took the lives of more than 25,000 people per day, or about 17 people per minute, between December 1932 and the fall of 1933.

While the famine was raging in the Ukraine, Stalin was exporting Ukrainian grain to the West.

As explained by the Famine Commemorative Committee, "The 1932-33 famine was artificial in that it owed nothing to climatic conditions. It was a direct result of Moscow's imposition of excessive grain procurement quotas on Ukraine. Troops were sent into the villages to force peasants to surrender their last morsel of bread. While the famine was raging in Ukraine, Stalin was exporting Ukrainian grain to the West."

Edmonton Journal staff writer Tom Barrett conducted a series of interviews with Ukrainian survivors and described the famine as "A season in hell that staggers the imagination. Some events literally defy comprehension. Who can imagine being reduced to eating dogs, cats, mice, even horse manure to survive? Not only thinking the unthinkable but doing it."

Malcolm Muggeridge, of the *Manchester Guardian*, travelled to Ukraine in 1933 for an eyewitness account of the famine and was recently interviewed in his cottage in Sussex, England. Explains Muggeridge, "The novelty of this particular famine, what made it so diabolical, is that it was not the result of some catastrophe like a drought or an epidemic. It was the deliberate creation of a bureaucratic mind which demanded the collectivization of agriculture, without

swelling of the hands, feet, and stomach. Then death." *Alberta Report*, October 31, 1983, on starvation.

any consideration whatever of the consequences in human suffering." (*Black Spring: A Documentary History of the Ukrainian Famine of 1933* by Marco Carynnyk).

Another first-hand account describing the famine was given in the *Jewish Daily Forward*, New York, Dec. 27, 1933: "Yes, we saw it with our own eyes in the Ukraine — real unrestrained famine along with hunger, typhus, naked corpses, empty villages whose inhabitants have been destroyed, died or run away, and with cannibalism that has ceased to be a punishable crime."

How Did An Estimated 7 Million People Die?

The following is a summary based primarily on the essay written by the U of A Ukrainian Studies Professor, Dr. Bohdan Krawchenko, an expert on the Ukrainian famine.

Just four years after the Bolsheviks (Communists) seized power in the USSR in 1917, the Soviet Union invaded and conquered Ukraine. Throughout the 1920s, Ukraine was the strongest, most self-assertive national republic in the USSR.

It was not until 1928, however, that Soviet leader Joseph Stalin announced his first five-year plan. The goal was rapid industrialization of a backward economy, regardless of human cost.

Because of the rapid industrialization, greater quantities of food would be required to feed the growing urban populations. Furthermore, to maintain the accelerating pace of industrialization, more funds would be needed. This could be obtained by exporting grain to the West.

The quickest way to accomplish this goal was to establish collective farms by expropriating all peasant land, grain reserves, and livestock without compensation. Because the collective farms would be owned by the state, the farmers would then be forced to turn over virtually all their produce to the government.

According to Dr. James Mace, a Harvard University Research Fellow who spoke in Edmonton last April, collectivization in Ukraine was also designed to destroy the Ukrainian peasants as an independent political force. As stated in the Soviet newspaper, *Proletarska Pravda* (22.1.1930), collectivization's second goal was to "destroy the social basis of Ukrainian nationalism — individual peasant agriculture."

Realizing that collectivization of private farms would be met with stringent opposition, particularly in Ukraine, Stalin began a long series of purges with the goal to eliminate all threats of potential opposition.

The "liquidation" of — according to official Soviet sources — one million kulaks (wealthy farmers), cultural and political figures, was sure to reduce any organized resistance to the forthcoming confiscation of all property and food.

These purges occurred between 1930 and 1932. With most potential opposition gone, the stage for forced collectivization and the resulting genocide was not set.

When collectivization began, those who resisted were either executed or sent to prison camps in northern Siberia. Few of those sent to the prison camps ever returned.

With the relentless drive toward collectivization, state-owned farms destroyed productive incentives for the farmers. To make matters worse, Moscow sent troops to requisition virtually all the grain grown by the farmers who worked on either the individual or collective farms.

To prevent peasants from eating the food grown on the collective farms, the Communists passed a "theft of socialist property" law in August, 1932, stipulating the death penalty for anyone eating the food they grew.

Dogs and cats went early. Cannibalism came later.

The massive starvation this policy created drove the people to "peeling bark off the trees, and roots from the fields. Dogs and cats went early.

Cannibalism came later. Fresh corpses were dug up and boiled for stew." (*Alberta Report*, October 31, 1983).

Because of the desperate situation, international relief organizations offered to help feed the starving peasants. Included in those offering to help were Ukrainian farmers from the Canadian Prairies. Though suffering themselves from the great depression, they acted through the Red Cross in hopes of helping to feed the starving Ukrainians.

Their offer, like all others, was callously rejected by the Soviet government. Furthermore, to ensure the Ukrainians could not escape in search of food, the borders around Ukraine were sealed. This simultaneously reduced the number of foreign journalists who could enter Ukraine and report on the famine.

Professor Yar Slavutych, a survivor, explained that there had been so much grain grown in the 1932 Ukrainian harvests, not all of it could be exported. While human corpses were everywhere in sight, he remembered how the Soviet soldiers stood guard around the extra grain that was decaying.

Anyone who approached within 50 feet was shot immediately. According to the survivors, only those who wisely hid grain or successfully foraged for illicit food survived the famine.

The backbone of Ukrainian nationalism was finally snapped.

Who Was To Blame?

The USSR blatantly denies that a Ukrainian famine even existed. Said Dr. Krawchenko at Edmonton's October 23 rally, "Half a century has passed since the famine. Yet the Soviet government to this day refuses to acknowledge that it took place, and does everything in its power to remove traces of this cataclysmic event."

Nevertheless, the official Soviet line contradicts statements and publications produced by the Soviet government itself. For example, on December 10, 1953, the Soviet official news agency *Pravda* quoted former Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev regarding the Ukrainian famine: "Their method was like this: they sold grain abroad, while in some regions people were swollen with hunger and even dying for lack of bread."

In the 1970 book, *Khrushchev Remembers*, a collection of Nikita Khrushchev's memoirs, Khrushchev explains how "Subsequently word got around that famine had broken out in Ukraine. I couldn't believe it. I'd left Ukraine in 1929, only 3 years before, when Ukraine had pulled itself up to pre-war living standards. Food had been plentiful and cheap. Yet now, we were told, people were starving. It was incredible.... Mikoyan told me that Comrade Demchenko, who was then First Secretary of the Kiev Regional Committee, once came to see him in Moscow. Here's what Demchenko said "....a train recently pulled into Kiev loaded with the corpses of people who had starved to death. It picked up corpses all the way from Poltava to Kiev." (p.73-74).

In the book, *I Chose Freedom: The Personal and Political Life of a Soviet Official*, Victor Kravchenko described his experience as a Soviet official who was ordered to help carry out the repression of the Ukrainian peasants:

"Three hundred of us from various city organizations gathered at the Regional Committee headquarters. The secretary of the committee and one of the foremost Communists of the Ukraine, Comrade Khatayevich, made the principal speech.... The hint was too clear to be missed. Upon our success or failure in the famine regions would depend on our political survival."

"Your loyalty to the Party and to Comrade Stalin will be tested and measured by your work in the villages," he (Comrade Khatayevich) declared ominously. "There is no room for weakness..."

"Armed with a mandate from the Regional Committee, I set out for the Piatykhatky district..."

Even Soviet publications, such as "Agriculture of the USSR", printed in Moscow in 1936, display the drastic fall in Ukrainian grain consumption during 1932 and 1933. As well, the 1926 Soviet population census showed there were 31.2 million Ukrainians in the USSR. The 1939 Soviet census reported a drop of 3.1 million to 28.1 million, when there should have been a natural increase.

There had been no emigration from the Ukraine, and the 11 per cent drop of the Ukrainian population is in sharp contrast to the 28 per cent rise in the ethnic Russian population over the same 13-year period.

Soviet official Sklar summarized his government's callous attitude when he said, "Suppose 6,000,000 more