

EYEWITNESS RECOLLECTIONS

Survivors' accounts

The following eyewitness accounts were first published in the two-volume publication "The Black Deeds of the Kremlin: A White Book," published in 1953 and 1955 by the Democratic Organization of Ukrainians Formerly Persecuted by the Soviet Regime.

A *The people themselves assumed an entirely different attitude towards those who suffered from hunger. This is what R.B., an agronomist who traveled through Ukraine from Kiev to Donbas in March of 1933, says on the subject.*

Two peasant women boarded our car at the Hrebinka station. They looked frightened, but they got in with their children and stood in the corridor. This was an express train from Shepetivka to Baku, which made only the major stops. For that reason, and also because it had already been filled in Kiev, so far no starving peasants had boarded our car.

Although it was quite crowded, people in our compartment squeezed a little tighter and made room for the new passengers. They came in and sat down, holding their children's hands. They had no baggage, except a very small bundle in the hands of each woman. In reply to our questions they told us with some hesitation that they were going to the Donbas, where there were some people from their village, and they expected to get bread and possibly work with their aid, but they feared for the fate of their children.

A little boy, about 4 years old, who had been sitting in his mother's lap, now said "Mother, I want something to eat." The woman looked at him with pity and started untying her small bundle, from which she pulled out a piece of something black, resembling bread. She broke it up and divided it among the children.

The passengers now got busy; each pulled something out of his bag and gave it to them.

"Mother, look, real bread," cried the little girl, when she had a piece of standard rationed Soviet bread from one of the passengers. The children scrambled all over each other, as if each wanted the other's piece of bread. Their eyes were glowing, like those of hungry animals.

Somebody remarked that it was not good for them to eat a lot at first. The mothers then held the collected goods in their laps. Tears streamed down their faces; then the children cried, too, and all of the other women in the compartment. Many men turned their faces away, unable to conceal their tears. Some spell had been broken. That which hitherto people could only imagine now confronted them as grim reality.



A mother and her son, homeless and hungry, were photographed during their futile search for food. The photo appeared in the New York Evening Journal. The caption noted that there were thousands of such peasants wandering throughout Ukraine.

EYEWITNESS RECOLLECTIONS

(B)

Pavlo Bozhko recalled the following episode.

Once, in the Sakhnovshansk district of the Poltava region, there were rich farms inhabited by well-to-do Ukrainian farmers. When collectivization started these farms were all dekurkulized and obliterated; on their sites several hog radhosps (Soviet state farms) were set up. I worked at one of these, called the "Paris Commune," during 1932-33.

At that time, famine was raging everywhere. The Soviet state farm workers lived wretchedly. They did not receive any wages for their work although, to be sure, their need for bread was greater than their need for money, since the starvation rations they received were indeed miserable. Still, none of us workers died, nor were we unduly famished at the time.

No famine was intended for the hogs of the state farm. These received regularly, according to plan, a variety of concentrated feed such as rye, corn millet and barley of fairly good quality. Bread was baked for us from the hog feed, each worker receiving 800 grams daily and each non-worker receiving 400 grams per day.

There was an extra ration of soup and meat from the kitchen besides, that was not bad at all. Every day it was necessary to slaughter one or another of the several thousand hogs because it had been injured or had some non-contagious disease. All this was used by our kitchen.

Paying no heed to the strict control of the political department, we all stole pocketfuls of hog feed to bolster the surrounding population, but it was not enough.

In the villages all around us, such as Mazharka, Tarasivka, Kopanky and Kotivka, a most fearful famine was raging. There was no one to dig graves and bury the dead.

The starving from all the villages around dragged themselves to these state farms and begged for work, but the farms could not take them all. Whoever was taken on, however, was saved by the hog feed from death by starvation.

The following recollection was related by R.L. Suslyk.

(C)

The authorities prohibited the grinding of grain by domestic millstones. If a millstone was discovered in a peasant dwelling, it was promptly broken and in some cases the owner was penalized by the confiscation of property or at least a fine.

Elaborate hiding places had to be devised. In 1932-33, the residents of the villages of Nirka and Severynivka in the Hrunsky region hid their millstones in a swamp between the villages. The swamp was dotted with dry areas on which the peasants could lay the millstones.

Grinding took place during the night in order to avoid the sharp eyes of the authorities.



A child experiences the agony of starvation.



Body of a famine victim lies in a hay wagon.

EYEWITNESS RECOLLECTIONS

The millstones were of diverse shapes and sizes, usually the prototype of the regular millstones at the flour mill.

Quite often the peasants devised various types of grinders, most commonly one made of a wagon wheel. A set of grooved cones would be inserted into the axle head of the wheel, one mobile and one stationary. Small quantities of grain would then be thrown in and crushed.

Machinists in the cities and towns aided the peasants by shaping the metal grinding plates and cones for them. Such utensils could easily be concealed by depositing them in a pot, filling it with water, and shoving it into an oven. It was possible to crush two kilograms of grain an hour with such an implement...

J.P. Muzyna, an eyewitness now residing in Detroit, tells of a case mentioned by William Henry Chamberlin.

(D) I witnessed the discovery of a slaughterhouse of children in Poltava. It was a small building in the center of the city. Right next to it were: railroad cooperative store No. 1, a railroad first-aid station, a pharmacy and a building for the homeless. A band of criminals lured small children, killed them, salted the meat in barrels and sold it. Refuse was dumped into an open sewer, whose banks were overgrown with high weeds, and they floated away. One day thousands gathered here to watch the GPU load a lot of children's clothes, shoes, schoolbags and other things on trucks. They had been stored in the attic, the criminals probably having no way of getting rid of them. All attempts of the GPU to disperse the mob of unfortunate mothers who had come to look for their lost children were of no avail. They had to resort to a threat of arms.

In his account, **L. Pylypenko** recalls the desperate measures employed by starving peasants.

The population of Rohozov in the Kiev region, in an effort to save their lives, used the most unlikely substances as foodstuffs. Some went into the fields where dead horses were buried and cut chunks of meat from the carcasses. (The horses were dying to the same extent as the people at the time.) They cooked the meat and ate it without bread or potatoes.

Others had dried calves' hides from former days; these were scalded with hot water, scraped free of hair, chopped in little pieces and boiled in water.

Still others went on hunger-swollen legs to the threshing grounds in the fields where the collective farm's threshing machine had worked the previous year. There, they winnowed the chaff in sieves, hunting for stray kernels of grain and weed seed. They pulverized these in a mortar and baked "baladony" of the flour.

When the spring sun became stronger and the drift ice began to break up in the ponds, the waves began to throw up dead fish along the shores; the people gathered this fish, cooked and ate it.



A crowd gathers before an empty food store in Kharkiv.



This photo by Thomas Walker shows a common sight along the road to Kharkiv. The corpses of 15 more victims were nearby, noted Mr. Walker in a caption to the photo.

EYEWITNESS RECOLLECTIONS

Later, when it became really warm and the white acacia trees began to bloom, the people picked these blossoms, dried them in ovens, crushed them in mortars and devised all sorts of culinary delicacies for a meal. The children swarmed like bees over the acacia trees, feasting on the sweet white blossoms.

The following was recalled by Natalka Zolotarevich.

In 1933 the superintendent of the district clinical hospital in Chornoukhy was a Jew named Moisei Davidovych Fishman. He and his wife, Olga Volkova, who was likewise a physician, never lost the milk of human kindness during those difficult years, and, instead of carrying out the orders of the authorities, they courageously ignored them and helped the starving populace.

At that time the authorities had forbidden doctors and hospitals to admit the starving for treatment if the diagnosed illness was "debility from hunger." One could get into a hospital only if one had some other illness. Nevertheless, the hospitals did feed the patients and would not let them die of hunger.

And so Dr. Fishman admitted people distended from hunger to his hospital at every possible opportunity, diagnosed their illness as due to some other cause and slowly restored them to a normal state. For his deeds, Dr. Fishman more than once had unpleasant interviews with the authorities, but being the good, authoritative physician he was, he did what his humane conscience prompted him to do, and defended himself against their attacks.

The memory of these two noble individuals, Drs. Fishman and Volkova, will long be cherished in the hearts of those people of the district whom they rescued from the famine.

The following incident is described by M.D., an engineer who worked on the railroads in the Northern Caucasus.

Early in 1933 from Kavkaz station in the Northern Caucasus, every morning at a fixed hour before dawn two mysterious trains would leave in the direction of Mineralni Vody and Rostov. The trains were empty and consisted of five to 10 freight cars each. Between two and four hours later the trains would return, stop for a certain time at a small way station, and then proceed on a dead-end spur towards a former ballast quarry. While the trains stopped in Kavkaz, or on a side track, all cars were locked, appeared loaded and were closely guarded by the NKVD.

Nobody paid any attention to the mysterious trains at first; I did not either. I worked there temporarily, being still a student of the Moscow Institute of Transportation. But one day conductor Kh., who was a Communist, called me quietly and took me to the trains, saying: "I want to show you what is in the cars." He opened the door of one car slightly, I looked in and almost swooned at the sight I saw. It was full of corpses, piled at random. The conductor later told me this story: "The stationmaster had secret orders from his superiors to comply



This orphaned girl (left) was found wandering the streets of Kiev. A homeless boy carries water in a bucket. (New York Evening Journal)



A boy who had no way of burying his deceased father attempted to cover his body with straw. (New York Evening Journal)

EYEWITNESS RECOLLECTIONS

with the request of the local and railroad NKVD and to have ready every dawn two trains of empty freight cars. The crew of the trains was guarded by the NKVD. The trains went out to collect the corpses of peasants who had died from famine and had been brought to railroad stations from nearby villages. Among the corpses were many persons still alive, who eventually died in the cars. The corpses were buried in the remote section beyond the quarries.

O. Osadchenko told this tragic account of the death of his entire family.

I come from the village of Barashi, of the same district in the Zhytomyr region. Since my uncle was a district official during the tsarist regime, we were not permitted to join the collective farm and had to live "as God wills." Enormous taxes were levied upon us which we were quite unable to meet.

In the fall of 1932 I was unable to pay my taxes, therefore the village activists, augmented by officials of the district authorities, seized all my belongings, even stripping my wife of the clothes she wore.

In the spring of 1933, my daughters, Vira and Maria, died of starvation, followed by my father and my wife's entire family.

One day in spring I went to the fields to look for some food. I was very swollen. As I proceeded slowly, I noticed the ravens flying around and alighting at a certain spot. I came closer and saw a woman lying down. She was still alive and begged me to help her to get up. But neither she nor I possessed sufficient strength.

I met the chairman of the village soviet, Suprunenko, and the secretary, Puman, on the way and told them about the dying woman; whereupon Suprunenko retorted: "You, too, will soon perish. Perish, you kurkuls, that is the way out for you if you do not want to make a living by decent work."

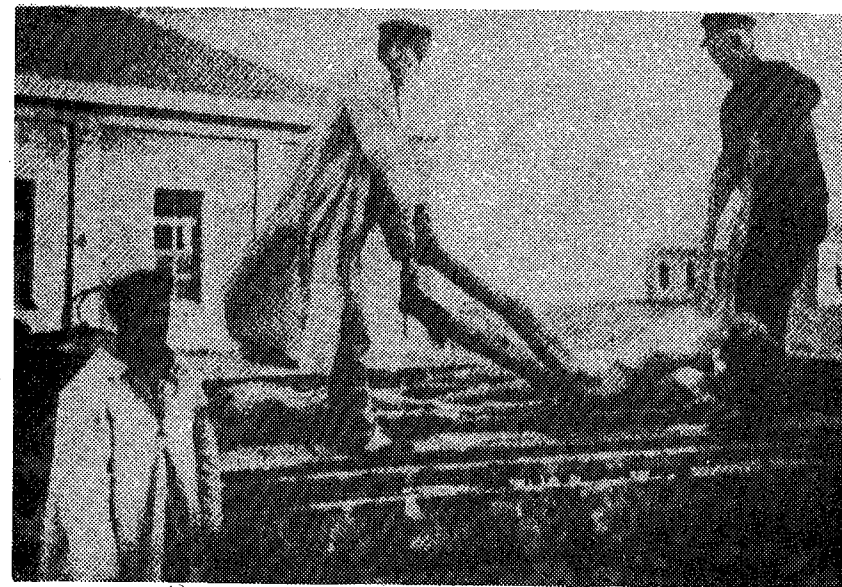
The following was recalled by Panas Kovalyk.

Toward the end of April 1933, the starving of the village of Novo-Voznesenka in the district of Vorontsiv, of the region of Mykolayiv, made an attack on the grain stockpile at Mali Hiria, where there was corn rotting in the open. The distance to the stockpile was 18 kilometers. Twenty-three persons fell dead along the way, but the rest managed to reach their destination.

Two NKVD men, Kuznetsov and Sablukov, met these hungry people with machine-gun fire. Yakiv Husynsky, a sailor from Simferopol, happened to come upon this scene. He stole up from the side, killed Kuznetsov and Sablukov with his pistol, pulled the machine guns down from the corn ricks, and trained one of them on the door to the office... Later he compelled them to take a count of the dead... There were 697. There were only a few wounded, because in this weakened condition many died even though only slightly wounded.



Hungry villagers on their way to the city of Kharkiv in search of food.



Corpses of famine victims are loaded onto a wagon to be taken out of the village.

EYEWITNESS RECOLLECTIONS

Iryna Medvid told the following story of her experiences as a teacher in famine-torn Ukraine.

On the orders of the People's Commissar of Education Mykola Skrypnyk, the third course in Kharkiv University in the academic year 1932-32 was divided into two parts. On the surface this seemed a logical move for students who were graduating from the pedagogical institute to practice teaching in schools. In reality, authorities had ulterior motives.

Arrests and escapes of many school teachers in Ukraine had resulted in a serious teacher shortage, and the order was issued to relieve the situation. I was assigned with a group of students to the Vovchansk district, in the Kharkiv region. The District Department of Education then sent me to student teach in a school at the children's village, Tsiurupa, which was located on the old estate of General Brusilov.

Even though the children's village was maintained by the government, the children were always hungry. The daily ration consisted of two thin slices of soggy bread, a colored liquid in the morning they called tea, a thin liquid they called soup and a thicker one called cereal for lunch, and again a thin liquid for dinner. The children were listless, apathetic, drowsy. They paid no attention and displayed little reaction to anything.

The small children suffered most of all because anything they had was stolen from them by the older ones. It was impossible to accomplish anything in such difficult conditions and finally all our youthful fervor waned amid the starvation and hopelessness.

One day, during the Russian-language period, I had gone through the whole program — checked the pupil's homework, explained the new assignment in the difficult foreign language and asked some questions. The monosyllabic answers took very little time. The classroom was shrouded in an oppressive stillness. The children sat motionless waiting for the bell, never laughing, talking or asking questions. I racked my brains wondering how to dispel the gloom and awaken some spark of interest in the children.

Then my eyes fell on a new April issue of the Teacher's Magazine. I leafed nervously through the pages until an article caught my attention and I began to read.

The children sat quietly for some time, then they began to perk up their heads and, opening their eyes in amazement, they came up and surrounded my desk.

I continued to read: "The children finished their lessons and the bell rang. Laughing and playing, they skipped downstairs to the dining room where lunch awaited them, among other things, cocoa, white bread and butter. The servant had extra work sweeping up bread crumbs which the boisterous children carelessly scattered."

The children around me, famished and just barely existing, suddenly spoke up. "Where, where was there such food?"

Choking back tears, I answered: "In Moscow."



This photo of a 14-year-old girl and her 2-year-old brother accompanied an article by Thomas Walker. Mr. Walker wrote that the boy had never tasted milk or butter.

EYEWITNESS RECOLLECTIONS

Andriy Melezhyk recalled this story of a mother eating her child.

(K) Luka Vasylyovych Bondar lived in Bilosivka in the district of Chornoukhy in the region of Poltava. He was 38 years old. He had a wife named Kulina and a 5-year-old daughter named Vaska. Before collectivization he owned five hectares of land, and therefore belonged to the class of poor peasant.

In March of 1933 Luka, although distended with hunger, went away to some distant villages in search of something to eat, and did not return. About a week later his wife Kulina died of starvation and the collective farm brigade removed her body to the cemetery.

After she was interred, the neighbors started wondering what had happened to her daughter Vaska, who was not known to have died. They entered Kulina's house and began to search for the child. In the oven they found a pot containing a boiled liver, heart and lungs. In the warming oven they found a large earthenware bowl filled with fresh salted meat, and in the cellar under a barrel they discovered a small hole in which a child's head, feet and hands were buried. It was the head of Kulina's little daughter, Vaska.

And there is also this horrific story. Nikifor Filimonovich Sviridenko, from the village of Kharkivtsi in the Pereyaslav district, was the son of poor people who did not own any land before the revolution. After the revolution Nikifor was given a piece of land, married his Nataalka, and set up housekeeping. He had two small children.

During the winter of 1932-33 the government, conducting its grain-garnering operations, relieved them of their last kernel of grain. Nikifor's relatives, like a great many other families, starved for some time and finally perished.

In February 1933, the neighbors noticed that for two or three days there had been no sign of life in Nikifor's dwelling. Accordingly, three women entered the house through the unlocked door. On the mud floor they saw Nikifor's corpse, while the dishevelled, hunger-distended Nataalka lay nearby. No children were to be seen. The neighbors asked Nataalka how she was feeling, and she answered, "I'm hungry. There's an iron pot on the porch. Bring it in. It has food in it."

One of the women went out to the porch and saw the little fingers of a child protruding from a small pot standing on the floor. She screamed in fright. The other woman came out, and removed the whole tiny hand from the whitish liquid in the pot.

They began to question the woman, "Where are your children, Nataalka?"

"They're on the porch," replied Nataalka, whose reason had been unbalanced by hunger.

Nikifor and Nataalka had murdered their children and eaten the first one, but had not yet begun on the second. Nikifor was dead, and Nataalka was taken to jail after this, but she also died there three days later.

Proof as to how widespread cannibalism had been in Ukraine at that time can



This photo, taken by Thomas Walker, shows a man who stepped too close to forbidden territory and was shot in the back without warning by a Soviet soldier. Standing over the dead man is his orphaned son. The two were picking up scattered grains of wheat on a Soviet collective farm in Bilhorod.

EYEWITNESS RECOLLECTIONS

be furnished by such facts as these: in the Lukianovka jail in Kiev they had a separate building for "maneaters." Among the prisoners in the Solovky Islands in 1938 there was 325 cannibals of 1932-33, of whom 75 were men and 250 women.

Stepan Dubovyk recalled this story of trying to flee the famine.

On May 13, 1930, my father and I, after being dekurkulized, were confined in Kharkiv prison. All our possessions, our home, grain, horses, barns, orchards were given to the poor.

I escaped from prison and for a time hid with a Bulgarian in Kharkiv, at 36 Ivanytska St. After some time I secured work on the railroad in Balaklavya where I had a chance to see how, every night, hundreds of people were brought to the station, loaded into freight cars and shipped to the north. A little later I became a reserve train conductor, stationed at Osnova.

At the peak of the famine, 1933, I, as head of a train, had occasion to help people, which I did as much as possible. For instance, on May 15, I received an order from the personnel director, Petro Shapozhnik, to take passenger train No. 315-316 from Osnova to Balaklavya on the Kharkiv-Levada route. This was an order at a time when tickets were sold only to holders of official documents, which meant only those who were employed. This ruling barred farmers from travel.

Our train reached Balaklavya in the evening and remained there until 4 a.m. the following morning. Many people, their hands and feet swollen from starvation, were milling about the station trying to get on the train to seek bread in the cities and towns. They begged and pleaded, but were refused tickets for the journey. It was a pitiful, distressing scene. Finally, I ordered the guards to take them on and they did.

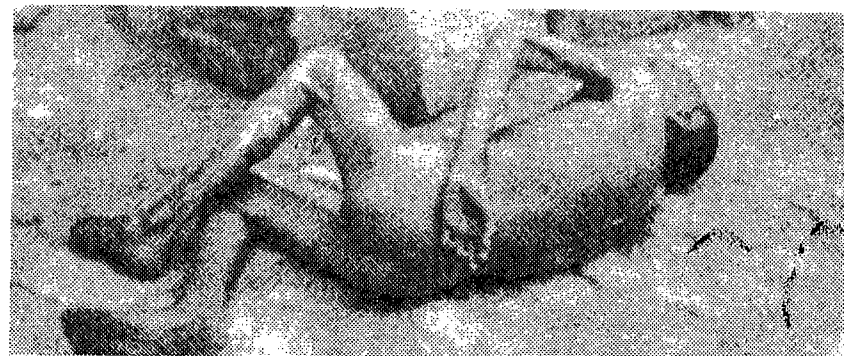
From Balaklavya the train went to Kharkiv, and then returned to Osnova. The head guard, Onopko, and the head of the workers' committee, Svinariov, started proceedings against me. I was accused of organizing the illegal transportation of passengers and was dismissed from work. My pay was withheld.

This ban on free travel by starving farmers was an added cause of the deaths of hundreds of people in the surrounding districts. For example, 400 people died of starvation in the village of Borshchivka, 350 in the village of Blahodyrivka, 300 in Virbiuka, an unaccounted number in Savyntsi, 1,000 in Balaklavya, 600 in Andriyivka, 700 in Henkivka, 1,200 in the collective farm "Red Star," 1,800 in the small towns of Boromlia, and so on in all the villages, hamlets and towns throughout Ukraine. All these figures are approximations.

Graves could not be dug fast enough to bury all the dead, so they were simply dumped in wells or any holes or pits that could be found, and covered with dirt when they were full.



A 15-year-old boy (left) is a veritable skeleton because of lack of food. The villager above spent two years in jail where he suffered many tortures, and then was released and found himself fighting starvation, according to the New York Evening Journal.



A naked corpse, stripped of clothing during the night, lies on the street.

EYEWITNESS RECOLLECTIONS

The following account was provided by **Maria Zuk**, who left famine-torn Ukraine in September 1933 to join her husband in Canada.

The account appeared in the October 12, 1933, issue of *Svoboda*.

The conditions in Ukraine were bad enough in 1930, but in 1931 they became really critical. The present situation is as follows. There is literally no bread there; no potatoes (all the seed potatoes having been eaten up); no meat, no sugar; in a word, nothing of the basic necessities of life. Last year some food was obtainable occasionally for money, but this year most of the bazaars (markets) are closed and empty. All cats and dogs disappeared, having perished or been eaten by the hungry farmers. The same is the case with the horses, so that cows are mostly used as draught animals. People also consumed all the field mice and frogs they could obtain. The only food most of the people can afford is a simple soup prepared of water, salt and various weeds. If somebody manages to get a cup of millet in some way, a tablespoon of it transforms the soup into a rare delicacy. This soup, eaten two or three times a day, is also the only food of the small children, as cow or any other milk has become a mere myth.

This soup has no nutritive value whatever, and people remaining on such a diet get first swollen limbs and faces, which makes them appear like some dreadful caricature of human beings, then gradually turn into living skeletons, and finally drop dead wherever they stand or go. The dead bodies are held at the morgue until they number 50 or more, and then are buried in mass graves. In the summer the burials take place more often in view of quick decomposition which cannot be checked even by liberal use of creoline. Especially devastating is the mortality from hunger among children and elderly people. Nobody ventures to dress the dead family members in any clothes, as the next day they would be found at the morgue, naked, stripped of everything by unknown criminals.

There are many cases of suicide, mostly by hanging, among the village population, and also many mental alienations.

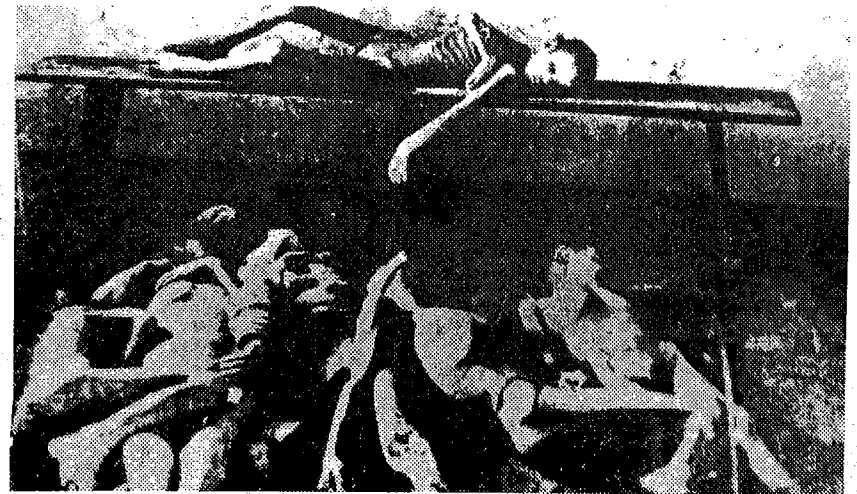
The famine in Soviet Ukraine in 1921 was undoubtedly a terrible one, but it appears like child's play in comparison with the present situation.

The village Kulmazovka was one of the more fortunate ones, but in the adjoining villages of Okshanka and Synukhin the death toll defied all description. Those who were not deported to the dreaded Solovetsky Islands, or to the Ural Mountains, died from starvation, and at present not more than one quarter of the original population is living there — and they are leading a life of misery. No word of complaint or criticism, however, is tolerated by the authorities, and those guilty of an infraction of this enforced silence disappear quickly in a mysterious way.

Worst of all, there is no escape from this hell on earth, as no one can obtain permission to leave the boundaries of Ukraine, once the granary of Europe, and now a valley of tears and hunger.



The boys above were lucky to find some half-rotten potatoes buried in the ground.



The unburied corpses of several who died of starvation.

Press accounts

The following excerpt is from a story by William Henry Chamberlin, the Christian Science Monitor's Moscow correspondent for 10 years. The article appeared in the May 29, 1934, issue of the Christian Science Monitor.

① Some idea of the scope of the famine, the very existence of which was stubbornly and not unsuccessfully concealed from the outside world by the Soviet authorities, may be gauged from the fact that in three widely separated regions of Ukraine and the North Caucasus which I visited — Poltava and Byelaya Tserkov and Kropotkin in the North Caucasus — mortality, according to the estimates of such responsible local authorities as Soviet and collective farm presidents, ranged around 10 percent. Among individual peasants and in villages far away from the railroad it was often much higher.

I crossed Ukraine from the southeast to the northwest by train, and at every station where I made inquiries the peasants told the same story of major famine during the winter and spring of 1932-33.

If one considers that the population of Ukraine is about 35 million and that of the North Caucasus about 10 million and that credible reports of similar famine came from parts of the country which I did not visit, some regions of the Middle and Lower Volga and Kazakhstan, in Central Asia, it would seem highly probable that between 4 million and 5 million people over and above the normal mortality rate lost their lives from hunger and related causes. This is the reality behind the innocuous phrases tolerated by the Soviet censorship, about food stringency, strained food situation, etc.

What lay behind this major human catastrophe? It was very definitely not a result of any natural disaster, such as exceptional drought or flood, because it was the general testimony of the peasants that the harvest of 1932, although not satisfactory, would have left them enough for nourishment, if the state had not swooped down on them with heavy requisitions.

Hidden stocks of grain which the despairing peasants had buried in the ground were dug up and confiscated; where resistance to the state measures was especially strong, as in some stanytsias, or Cossack towns, in the Western Kuban, whole communities were driven from their homes and exiled en masse, to the frozen wastes of Siberia.

② *Thomas Walker, an American newspaperman who reported extensively on the famine, provided the following account, which appeared in the February 18, 1935, issue of the New York Evening Journal.*

I have recently toured the Ukraine... where 6 million peasants have perished

from starvation in the past 18 months, due to the excessive tolls made on their crops by the Bolshevik government.

Last winter, Red Army soldiers, under orders from Moscow, took so much of the season's crops from the peasants that they were unable to feed themselves and their livestock through the winter.

About 20 miles south of Kiev, I came upon a village that was practically extinct by starvation. There had been 15 houses in this village and a population of 40-odd persons.

Every dog and cat in the village had been eaten. The horses and the oxen had all been appropriated by the Bolsheviks to stock the collective farms...

In one hut they were cooking a mess that defied analysis. There were bones, pigweed, skin and what looked like a boot top in this pot. The way that the remaining half dozen inhabitants eagerly watched this slimy mess showed the state of their hunger.

③ *The following details were provided by Harry Lang, who was born in tsarist Russia and came to the United States in 1904. He witnessed the famine as a correspondent for the Daily Forward, a Jewish Socialist newspaper based in New York. The accounts appeared in the April 16, 1935, issue of the New York Evening Journal.*

We arrived in Kharkov, then the capital of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. The first street scenes I saw spoke their own language. Men and women were returning at sunset from the great tractor plant and other factories. Their clothes were old, dirty strips of sacking... Many women were carrying infants in their arms.

And all, men and women alike, thousands of them, had lumps of black bread under their tattered sleeves. On the way, they nibbled at the bread and swallowed every crumb. The hand of hunger was sticking out from the mutilated chunks of bread.

A high official of the Ukrainian Soviet, with whom we established contact, confidentially advised me to take a trip to the villages. Only there, he said, would I see the full handiwork of the famine. And he added:

"Six million people have perished from hunger in our country in 1932-33." Then he paused, and repeated: "Six million."

One of the grave-diggers came up to me and started a conversation.

"You are looking at our fresh graves?" he said. "You see, Kiev has also made its contribution to the second Five-Year Plan. Tell my brothers in America about it."

EYEWITNESS RECOLLECTIONS

In the Kiev cemetery I saw hundreds of people scarified by the GPU, bearing the marks of torture from persecution and hunger. They stood over the graves of their dear ones and begged the dead for bread.

I walked along until I came to a woman sobbing and crying aloud.

"What shall I tell you, my dear sister? You are well off. You see nothing you hear nothing. Mother wanted to come and join you today. But she hasn't the strength. We have nothing to eat at home, dear sister. Do you remember the beautiful home which we once had?" She was talking to the dead.

A young man, with his eyes half-closed, was addressing himself to two graves over which stood one headstone:

"Can you do nothing for me? Nothing? How long must I continue to suffer?"

With bated breath I was watching the Soviet investigators at work. Suddenly something else caught my eye. A peasant woman, dressed in something like patched old sacks, appeared from a side path. She was dragging a child of 3 or 4 years old by the collar of a torn coat, the way one drags a heavy bagload. The woman pulled the child into the main street. Here she dropped it in the mud... The peasant woman was the mother. The child's little face was bloated and blue. There was foam around the little lips. The hands and tiny body were swollen. Here was a bundle of human parts, all deathly sick, yet still held together by the breath of life.

The mother left the child on the road in the hope that somebody might do something to save it.

My escort endeavored to hearten me. Thousands and thousands of such children, he told me, had met a similar fate in Ukraine that year...

Whiting Williams also witnessed the horrors of famine in Ukraine. The following account was published in London in the journal *Answers* in 1934.

I am not reporting merely what I have heard. Once I saw with my own eyes the victims of famine. Men and women were literally dying of hunger in the gutter... They ("wild children") sat in the streets, their eyes glazed with despair and privation, begging as I have never seen anyone beg before... There was one youngster I saw in Kharkov. Half-naked, he sunk, exhausted, on the carriage-way, with the curbstone as a pillow, and his pipe-stem legs sprawled out, regardless of danger from passing wheels. Another — a boy of 8 or 9 — was sitting among the debris of a street market, picking eggshells out of dirt and examining them with heartbreaking minuteness in the hope of finding a scrap of food still sticking to them. His shrunken cheeks were covered with an unhealthy

EYEWITNESS RECOLLECTIONS

whitish down that made me think of those fungoid growths that sprout in the darkness out of dying trees.

...There are hordes of those wild children in all the towns. They live and die like animals.

From other sources I heard whispers of a still stranger and more dreadful possibility — that some of the leaders of Russian communism today might regard the continuance of the famine over this winter as being quite useful, because it would drive home to peasants and factory hands alike the grim but essential lesson: "work or starve."

Personally, I find it difficult to believe this. It is too inhuman! But I know that one British agricultural expert, who has traveled widely in Russia and knows the psychology of its rulers, has suggested quite seriously that the famine may be starvation "according to plan."

⑤ Well-known British journalist and author **Malcolm Muggeridge**, who was a Moscow correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian* in the early 1930s, recalled the famine in the March 1958 issue of *Encounter*.

When I was a newspaper correspondent in Moscow in the early 1930s ... the newspapers were our only source of information.

Some of the correspondents, like Louis Fisher at that time, felt bound to defend the regime. They somehow managed to sustain their Soviet addiction, and to write little homilies in the *Nation* and other such publications on the theme: "I have seen the future and it works." They had seen the future all right, but it didn't work, except as the past had worked — brutally, mendaciously and callously.

Occasionally Fisher would go so far as to rebuke the rest of us for our flippancy and skepticism, with the air of a choirmaster calling sniggering, whispering choirboys to order and due solemnity.

Other correspondents, like Walter Duranty of The New York Times, just wanted to stay in Moscow, where they managed to have a fairly prosperous and comfortable time on bootlegged rubles. The official rate was about six to the pound, but it was fairly easy to get 400. One would collect them in large newspaper parcels, like fried fish.

Duranty presumably calculated that, in the circumstances, he might as well send what was pleasing to the Soviet authorities. And The New York Times was happy enough to use his messages. They were fit to print. It is part of the mystique of newspapers that what matters is where news derives, not whether it is reliable. In the eyes of night editors, the dateline is all.

I remember in particular a message Duranty sent when Ukraine was suffering an acute famine due to the forced collectivization of agriculture. He dwelt

EYEWITNESS RECOLLECTIONS

picturesquely upon the apple-cheeked milkmaids, the bursting granaries, the fat cattle and the lush crops.

No doubt someone will one day dig all this out and prove, on the strength of The New York Times's reputation or reliability, convincingly that, despite subsequent official admissions, there was no famine in the USSR in the winter of 1932-33.

Future historians are likely to find this age more difficult than the Dark Ages to document, but for the opposite reasons — because there is so vast and contradictory an amount of documentation, mostly deliberately faked.

The following incident was recalled by Eugene Lyons in his 1937 book "Assignment in Utopia." Mr. Lyons reported from the Soviet Union for United Press from 1928 to 1934.

It was at the railroad station at R., while on a trip into the country, in the summer of 1932, that I witnessed a scene which was to prove more significant than I guessed at the moment — a tiny symptom of the shattering tragedy engulfing southern Russian [Ukraine]. An old peasant, with a shaggy head and matted beard, wearing a burlap coat, patched trousers and reed shoes was weeping aloud, unashamedly, and pleading with the stationmaster through his sobs. The peasant was holding a large heavy sack.

"You can go on the next train, tomorrow morning, yes," the stationmaster said, not unkindly, "but not your bundle. Law is law — no bread can be transported without a license."

"But, citizen stationmaster, dear one," the old man repeated, "how can I return to the village with empty hands? Without the money and without bread? Tell me, dear one, how shall I face the village? They await my return and their bellies are empty. Now I have spent all their money — no bread, no money..."

The stationmaster shrugged his shoulders. He had been listening to this refrain for hours: since his men ordered the shaggy peasant and his sack off the train. The peasant now turned to me and several other spectators.

"Some of us in the village" — he mentioned a province in Ukraine — "got together. We threw our money in one pot, and they chose me to go north, where money could buy bread. I paid a fortune for what I have in this sack. And now they won't let me take it to the village. And why? Others in nearby villages did the same, and they had bread to eat for weeks. They feasted. Why were they allowed but not I? Is that Soviet justice? Citizen stationmaster, whom will it harm if I take this bag on a train? I shall keep it on my lap and creep into a corner on the topmost shelf."

"It will do you no good, citizen," the stationmaster said. "You'll be chucked off at some other station. Law is law."

Several weeks earlier I had read the decree forbidding the transport of bread

EYEWITNESS RECOLLECTIONS

and other food products without a license. The purpose, the papers explained dishonestly, was to prevent the further overcrowding of trains. I had wondered whether the decree deserved a line by cable, and decided against it.

The weeping old peasant hit by the decree, unable to understand why he should not be permitted to bring bread to his family and his neighbors, personalized that law for me. Always, anywhere, it is easier to accept news in the abstract, in cold print, than in its warm human form. For months I forgot this incident. Then, as the horrors of famine began to pile up, the scene came to life again in my mind, its every lineament sharply etched. Not all the sophistries of my Communist friends explaining and justifying the famine could erase this old man in his burlap coat.

The following recollection of the famine was provided by Arthur Koestler, journalist and author of 36 books, many of them powerfully anti-totalitarian. It appears in "The Yogi and the Commissar" (1945).

I spent the winter of 1932-33 mainly in Kharkov, then capital of the Ukraine. It was the catastrophic winter after the first wave of collectivization of the land; the peasants had killed their cattle, burned or hidden their crops and were dying of starvation and typhoid; the number of deaths in the Ukraine alone is estimated at about 2 million. Traveling through the countryside was like running the gauntlet: the stations were lined with begging peasants with swollen hands and feet, the women holding up to the carriage windows horrible infants with enormous wobbling heads, sticklike limbs, swollen, pointed bellies. You could swap a loaf of bread for Ukrainian embroidered kerchiefs, national costumes and bedcovers; foreigners could sleep with practically any girl, except party members, for a pair of shoes or stockings. Under my hotel room window in Kharkov funeral processions marched past all day. The electricity supply in Kharkov had broken down; there was no light in the town, and the trams functioned only for an hour or so a day to take workers to the factories and back. There was also no fuel or petrol in the town and the winter was hard even for the Ukraine, with temperatures of 30°C below zero. Life seemed to have come to a standstill, the whole machinery on the verge of collapse.

These were the conditions which drove the old Bolshevik guard into opposition against Stalin, to their half-hearted conspiracy of despair; they were the real background of the purges and trials. Today the catastrophe of 1932-33 is more or less frankly admitted in Soviet circles; but at the time not the slightest allusion to real conditions was allowed to appear in the Soviet press, including the newspapers of the Ukraine itself. Each morning when I read the Kharkov Kommunist I learned about plan figures reached and over-reached, about competitions between factory shock brigades, awards of the Red Banner, new giant combines in the Urals, and so on; the photographs were either of young

EYEWITNESS RECOLLECTIONS

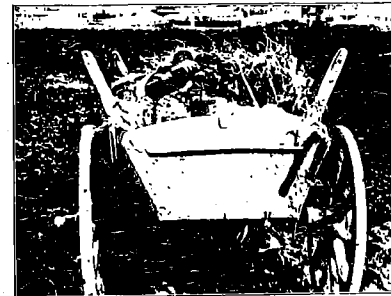
people, always laughing and always carrying a banner in their hands, or of some picturesque elder in Uzbekistan, always smiling and always learning the alphabet. Not one word about the local famine, epidemics, the dying out of whole villages; even the fact that there was no electricity in Kharkov was not once mentioned in the Kharkov newspaper. It gave one a feeling of dreamlike unreality; the paper seemed to talk about some quite different country which had no point of contact with the daily life we led; and the same applies to the radio.

The consequence of all this was that the vast majority of people in Moscow had no idea of what went on in Kharkov, and even less of what went on in Tashkent, or Archangel, or Vladivostok — 12 days' train journey away, in a country where traveling was reserved for government officials; and these travelers were not of a talkative nature. The enormous land was covered by a blanket of silence and nobody outside the small circle of initiated could form a comprehensive picture of the situation.

A second belt of silence isolated the country from contacts with the outside world. Foreign missions and newspaper correspondents were concentrated in Moscow. The capital had priority in everything, from food and fuel to industrial goods, toothbrushes, lipsticks, contraceptives and other luxuries unknown in the rest of the country; its living standard was entirely unrepresentative. If the average citizen of Moscow was to a large extent ignorant of what was going on in remoter parts of his own country, the foreigner's ignorance was unbounded. He could only travel chaperoned by security officials performing the various functions of interpreters, guides, car drivers, chance acquaintances and even amorous conquests. His contacts were restricted to Soviet officials; to the ordinary Soviet citizen social intercourse with foreigners meant running the risk of being accused of espionage or treason. In addition to the difficulty of obtaining factual information, the foreign correspondent was faced with the problem of passing it on. To smuggle out news vetoed by the censor meant expulsion; a risk which both journalists and their employers will take only reluctantly, and only when vital issues are at stake. But 'vital issue' is an elastic term, and the practical result of continuous pressure was that even conscientious newspapermen evolved a routine of compromise; they cabled no lies, but no less volens confined themselves to "official dope" and expressed such comment or criticism as they dared "between the lines" by some subtle qualifying adjective or nuance — which naturally passed unobserved by anybody but the initiated reader.¹ The cumulative effect of all this was a picture distorted by half-truths and systematic omissions. This was the foundation on which direct Soviet propaganda could build.

1. I am talking, of course, of progressive and neutral papers; if the red scare campaign of the reactionary press had any influence on the Left at all, it was to increase their loyalty to the Soviet Union.

"PEASANTS IN UKRAINE BEING WIPED OUT"



GRIM-FACED HUMOR—In a wagon partly loaded with hay, a peasant partly dead, lay in the arms of his comrades. The dead peasant was a victim of the famine. The living peasant was a victim of the famine. The dead peasant was a victim of the famine. The living peasant was a victim of the famine.

the Communist Party so that there would be no one to blame when he died. It was upon the fact that this peasant died that the Red leaders accused it, a great privilege to permit the peasants to pick up the scattered pieces of wheat left from the spring sowing, and about without waiting their turn, but, unfortunately, the peasants, instead of using the grain for food, used it for seed.



JOURNEY'S END—Peasants, victims from pain and hunger came in line to this Kharkov station who traveled in no more than a pile of straw under a blanket. The dead peasant was a victim of the famine. The living peasant was a victim of the famine.

Walker was asked to help in disposing of the corpse as the child in was a woman who they were in a camp with her. A woman with young child asked for the child of the corpse to find them for an arrangement they might add to the camp the peasant. Her husband was not here to see them. Her story was like all the others. Mr. Walker showed this photograph in 1933.



STARK—Gladys Palmer was the body of a man with no clothing whose stomach had a ghastly rent, even the mark of the famine star. The corpse is being taken to the morgue.

Soviets Rob Farmers Of Crops

Continued from Previous Page.

that the peasants were not allowed to keep any grain for their own use. The peasants were forced to give all their grain to the state. The peasants were forced to give all their grain to the state.



PAY DIRT—Gladys Palmer was hungry peasant who was paid dirt for her grain. The dirt was given to the peasants as payment for their grain. The dirt was given to the peasants as payment for their grain.

one of two peasants each night and killed them. She was a woman who was paid dirt for her grain. The dirt was given to the peasants as payment for their grain. The dirt was given to the peasants as payment for their grain.



FRIGHTFUL—Boris Khariton, in a camp, was a victim of the famine. The child was a victim of the famine. The child was a victim of the famine. The child was a victim of the famine.

The March 3, 1935, issue of the New York Evening Journal featured these photos of famine-stricken Ukraine. The photographs were taken by Thomas Walker in the Poltava, Kharkiv and Bilhorod areas in Ukraine.