

A Survey of Developments in Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine by the
Regional Specialists of RFE/RL's Newslite Team

DENIAL OF FAMINE-TERROR CONTINUES UNABATED.

By Taras Kuzio

In April and May, a curious and, at times, highly charged discussion raged over the "Internet List H-Russia" on the 1932-1933 famine in Ukraine that led to the deaths of anywhere from 5-10 million people. The discussion is curious in that it was taking place a decade after the USSR collapsed and Ukraine established itself as an independent state.

The continued denial in this discussion of the artificiality of the 1932-1933 famine in Ukraine reflects widespread double standards.

First, there is a strong refusal among academics and journalists to place Soviet and Nazi crimes against humanity on the same level. The ideological preferences of some academics are allowed to interfere with their scholarly research. How else can we understand Western scholars whose decades-long infatuation with economic changes in the 1930s has included trying to explain away Stalinist crimes against humanity and the 1932-1933 famine as neither "artificial" nor part of a drive against "Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism?" The Soviet project, unlike the Nazi one, allegedly had "good intentions" that were warped by Stalin.

Second, objective discussion of the Ukrainian famine suffers from continued Russophile domination of Western history writing on Russia and in Western European post-Sovietology (primarily area studies). As with recent Ukrainian studies of the famine, Western historians have largely ignored the radical changes in post-Soviet Ukrainian historiography and continue to be influenced by 19th-century Russian nationalist writing where Ukraine (and Belarus) are treated as subsidiaries of the Russian (read East Slavic) nation. Oral memoirs on the famine collected from Ukrainian emigres "are highly unreliable," West Virginia University Professor Mark Tauger claimed in the "Internet List H-Russia" discussion. Yet, scholars do not deny the authenticity of oral memoirs for studies of the Holocaust.

The Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU), then still a republican subsidiary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, came under pressure between 1987-1990 from the cultural intelligentsia, informal groups such as Rukh and Memorial, and investigative journalists in Moscow and Ukraine who sought to unveil "blank spots" in Soviet Ukrainian and Ukrainian history. Finally, in February 1990, the KPU acknowledged that a famine had taken place in Ukraine that it blamed

on "Stalinism." The covering up of the famine, the KPU claimed, had "hindered scientific understanding and an objective, moral, and political assessment of a national tragedy."

After Ukraine became an independent state in January 1992, the famine question became the subject of countless books and scholarly articles, memoirs, and documents based upon hitherto closed KPU archives. A "Black Book on Ukraine" consisting of 1,000 pages of documents was published by Prosvita in Kyiv in 1998. In the first half of the 1990s, Ukrainian scholars redefined the famine as "genocide" or "terror-famine," and a monument was erected in central Kyiv. In September 1993, then-President Leonid Kravchuk called the death of one-fifth of Ukrainians "genocide." In November 2001, on the Day of Remembrance for these crimes, President Leonid Kuchma talked of "tens of millions" of Ukrainians who died in war, the "famine-terror," and the Gulag.

American-born Professor James Mace, who formerly headed the Washington-based U.S. Commission on the Ukrainian Famine in the 1980s and is currently at the Kyiv Mohyla Academy, wrote in 1995 that the famine was "the central question" for Ukrainian history. Mace remains convinced that the famine was primarily directed at Ukrainians. After the U.S. commission closed, Mace was unable to obtain academic employment in the United States; his cards had "been marked" as a "biased Ukrainian nationalist emigre."

Many Western academics at that time, and at present, continue to see studies of the famine published in the 1980s by Robert Conquest as "replete with errors and inconsistencies" and as "another expression of the Cold War," Professor Tauger argued in the "Internet List H-Russia" discussion. Mace responded in the discussion by describing Tauger's "baseless statistical circumlocutions" as "garbage."

Reading the "Internet List H-Russia" and Western, English-language academic publications on Eastern Europe leads to the impression that the large number of post-Soviet Ukrainian studies on the famine listed in the 2001 book "The Famine-Terror in Ukraine, 1932-1933: A Bibliography" published in Odesa-Kyiv are mainly ignored by Western scholars working on the Stalin era. The fact that these works are in Ukrainian, and not in Russian, the traditional language of Sovietology and post-Soviet studies, is no excuse not to use them. Unfortunately, there is still a stubbornly held view that Russian is sufficient for research into, and writing on, Ukraine (and Belarus).

Famine denial fails to deal with the question of why, if the famine took place throughout the former USSR, it has only left an imprint on Ukrainian consciousness. Ukraine was sealed off by the authorities, foreign journalists were prevented from visiting famine areas, foreign assistance was refused, and grain continued to be exported during the famine. Why is such a memory of the famine not present in the Russian consciousness if it was not just directed at Ukrainians?

On the 60th anniversary of the famine, President Kravchuk described the aims of the famine as an attempt "to uproot the entire Ukrainian soul," adding that "unacceptable living conditions were created to destroy a nation." Western scholars have yet to appreciate the extent to which denationalization in contemporary Ukraine and

Belarus is the product of the famine and Stalinist terror in the 1930s to 1950s.

In a 1991 book published in Kyiv, Lidia Kovalenko defined the famine as "dukhovna ruyina" (spiritual ruin). The destruction of the Ukrainian village, the national communist intelligentsia, and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church; an end to "indigenization" (Ukrainization); and a return to Russian nationalism in historiography all occurred at the same time in the first half of the 1930s.

According to a study by Raphael Lemkin published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, genocide can also refer to selective state actions "aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of life of national groups" in areas such as language, culture, religion, national feeling, and dignity. This view of genocide directed against Ukrainians in the 1930s was presented at the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes of Genocide in 1998 by Ukrainian Permanent Representative to the UN Volodymyr Yelchenko.

"To deny the genocide of Jews quite rightly brings opprobrium. Surely to deny the terror famine of 1932-33 ought to provoke the same response," Professor Elizabeth Haigh of Saint Mary's University argued in the "Internet List H-Russia" discussion. Famine denial, however, continues unabated. This is a fact that led Canadian Dr. Bohdan Krawchenko, vice rector of the Academy of Public Administration Under the Ukrainian President, to describe the discussion on "Internet List H-Russia" as "absurd and fundamentally immoral" and a "total abrogation of the responsibilities of intellectuals."

Dr. Taras Kuzio is a resident fellow at the Center for Russian and East European Studies, University of Toronto