



Yanukovich, Stalin and the Ukrainian famine

Regime threatens to undo nation's progress.

Taras Kuzio

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On May 5, the Communist Party unveiled a bust of Soviet leader and war criminal Josef Stalin in Zaporizhya. A second Stalin bust is rumored to be ready for Odesa. Billboards of Stalin have already gone up in Luhansk.

What is going on in Ukraine?

This is par for the course, to some degree. After all, Kyiv still has a statue to Vladimir Lenin, who created the Soviet secret police and established the gulag long before Stalin. Ukraine still has a Communist Party that is part of the ruling majority with the dominant Party of Regions, which stands for oligarchic capitalists, theoretically the opposite of what the Communists stand for.

But the unveiling of the Zaporizhya bust of Stalin and President Viktor Yanukovich's disregard for public sentiment shows reactionary policies at work. The gradual rehabilitation of Stalin, under way in Russia and Belarus, is now creeping into Ukraine, the former Soviet republic that has done the most to denounce Stalin and his crimes.

Yanukovich has moved away from the admittedly controversial view of the famine as genocide. But he also seeks to downplay the famine. On the day of his Feb. 25 inauguration, the famine section on www.president.gov.ua was removed. State Security Service head Valeriy Khoroshovsky closed the agency's archives, which had released documents from the Soviet KGB and its predecessors outlining totalitarian crimes against Ukrainians.

A 1+1 journalist has also complained about the famine becoming a taboo subject on commercial channels owned by pro-presidential oligarchs. He claimed that new directives that resemble Kuchma era temnyky are being given to television stations.

Stalin's rehabilitation in Ukraine has not gone unnoticed in the West. It will be another nail in the coffin of Ukraine's hopes of being seen as European.

At the Parliamentary Assembly Council of Europe (PACE) on April 27, the same day as parliament's ratification of the highly contentious Black Sea Fleet base treaty, a representative from Luxembourg asked Yanukovich: "It seems that in Ukraine, a process of heroization of Stalin, and increasingly, a return to the Soviet interpretation of the Second World War, is taking place."

Minister of Education Dmitri Tabachnyk has already outlined his view that Ukrainian textbooks should return to using Great Patriotic War rather than Second World War.

The Soviet interpretation ignores 1939-1941, when the U.S.S.R. was an ally of the Nazis and that, for Ukrainians, the war broke out in 1939 when Nazi ally Hungary attacked the Transcarpathian Ukrainian Republic and Poland, which was attacked in 1939 by both the Nazis and Stalinists.

Yanukovich's only response to the Stalin rehabilitation has been to call for a local referendum, which has been echoed by his deputy chief of staff, Hanna Herman.

Professor Andrea Graziosi has one of the best and most balanced analyses on this topic. You can read Graziosi's lecture on [the topic here](#). Graziosi shows how Stalin saw the peasantry as the main army of Ukrainian nationalist movement, and reasoned that by killing off the peasantry he takes the air out of nationalist movement he feared.

Yanukovich's views are a complete negation of three previous Ukrainian presidents on the famine question and not only the views of former President Viktor Yushchenko. Kuchma first described the famine as genocide on the 70th anniversary in 2003, when parliamentary hearings were held. A 1998 presidential decree declared the fourth Saturday of each November as National Day of Remembrance of Famine Victims.

What can the opposition do to take Yanukovich and his administration to task on this question? Three steps spring to mind:

Include in future election programs support for banning the Communist Party. Last year the Council of Europe placed Nazi and Soviet crimes on the same footing. Nazi parties are illegal in Austria, Germany and Italy; pass a law making propagation of Nazism and Stalinism illegal. It is illegal to wave Nazi flags and symbols in three European countries; and Launch an information campaign in eastern-southern Ukraine targeting Party of Regions voters who do not agree with the rehabilitation of Stalin. A poll by the Razumkov Ukrainian Center for Economic and Political Studies (www.uceps.com.ua) found that 57 percent of Ukrainians opposed the opening of Stalin

monuments and only 10 percent supported this step. Opposition to Stalin monuments is to be found across all age groups, including 52 percent of those aged 60 and over.

A moderate but still pro-Ukrainian viewpoint for Yanukovich would be to accept that the famine was a crime against Ukrainians while distancing himself from the genocide question.

Instead, Yanukovich has moved towards Russia's position of denial of the famine as a crime against Ukraine. In doing so, Yanukovich has turned the clock back two decades to before 1990 when the Communist Party first belatedly criticized the 1933 famine.

The only conclusion one can reach is that a reactionary program is in place to undermine two decades of achievements in Ukrainian nation-building.

Taras Kuzio is a senior fellow in the chair of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Toronto and editor of the bi-monthly Ukraine Analyst. He can be reached at tkuzio@rogers.com.