

Raphael Lemkin

SOVIET GENOCIDE IN UKRAINE

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You cannot love other peoples Unless you love Ukraine.

Volodymyr Sosiura: "Love Ukraine"¹

The mass murder of peoples and of nations that has characterized the advance of the Soviet Union into Europe is not a new feature of their policy of expansionism, it is not an innovation devised simply to bring uniformity out of the diversity of Poles, Hungarians, Balts, Romanians – presently disappearing into the fringes of their empire. Instead, it has been a long-term characteristic even of the internal policy of the Kremlin – one which the present masters have had ample precedent for in the operations of Tsarist Russia. It is indeed an indispensable step in the process of "union" that the Soviet leaders fondly hope will produce the "Soviet Man", the "Soviet Nation", and to achieve that goal, that unified nation, the leaders of the Kremlin will gladly destroy the nations and the cultures that have long inhabited Eastern Europe.

What I want to speak about is perhaps the classic example of Soviet genocide, its longest and broadest experiment in Russification – the destruction of the Ukrainian nation. This is, as I have said, only the logical successor of such Tsarist crimes as the drowning of 10,000 Crimean Tatars by order of Catherine the Great, the mass murders of Ivan the Terrible's "SS troops" – the Oprichnina; the extermination of National Polish leaders and Ukrainian Catholics by Nicholas I; and the series of Jewish pogroms that have stained Russian history periodically. And it has had its matches within the Soviet Union in the annihilation of the Ingerian nation, the Don and Kuban Cossacks, the Crimean Tatar Republics, the Baltic Nations of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia. Each is a case in the long-term policy of liquidation of non-Russian peoples by the removal of select parts.

Ukraine constitutes a slice of Southeastern USSR equal in area to France and Italy, and inhabited by some 30 million people². Itself the Russian bread basket, geography has made it a strategic key to the oil of the Caucasus and Iran, and to the entire Arab world. In the north, it borders Russia proper. As long as Ukraine retains its national unity, as long as its people continue to think of themselves as Ukrainians and to seek

independence, so long Ukraine poses a serious threat to the very heart of Sovietism. It is no wonder that the Communist leaders have attached the greatest importance to the Russification of this independent member of their 'Union of Republics', have determined to remake it to fit their pattern of one Russian nation. For the Ukrainian is not and has never been, a Russian. His culture, his temperament, his language, his religion – all are different. At the side door to Moscow, he has refused to be collectivized, accepting deportation, even death. And so it is peculiarly important that the Ukrainian be fitted into the procrustean pattern of the ideal Soviet man.

Ukraine is highly susceptible to racial murder by select parts and so the Communist tactics there have not followed the pattern taken by the German attacks against the Jews. The nation is too populous to be exterminated completely with any efficiency. However, its leadership, religious, intellectual, political, its select and determining parts, are quite small and therefore easily eliminated, and so it is upon these groups particularly that the full force of the Soviet axe has fallen, with its familiar tools of mass murder, deportation and forced labor, exile and starvation.

The attack has manifested a systematic pattern, with the whole process repeated again and again to meet fresh outbursts of national spirit. The first blow is aimed at the intelligentsia, the national brain, so as to paralyze the rest of the body. In 1920, 1926 and again in 1930–1933, teachers, writers, artists, thinkers, political leaders, were liquidated, imprisoned or deported. According to the *Ukrainian Quarterly* of Autumn 1948, 51,713 intellectuals were sent to Siberia in 1931 alone. At least 114 major poets, writers and artists, the most prominent cultural leaders of the nation, have met the same fate. It is conservatively estimated that at least 75% of the Ukrainian intellectuals and professional men in Western Ukraine, Carpatho-Ukraine and Bukovina have been brutally exterminated by the Russians (*ibid.*, Summer 1949).

Going along with this attack on the intelligentsia was an offensive against the Churches, priests and hierarchy, the 'soul' of Ukraine. Between 1926 and 1932, the Ukrainian Orthodox Autocephalous Church, its Metropolitan (Lypkivsky) and 10,000 clergy were liquidated. In 1945, when the Soviets established themselves in Western Ukraine, a similar fate was meted out to the Ukrainian Catholic Church. That Russification was the only issue involved is clearly demonstrated by the fact that before its liquidation, the Church was offered the opportunity to join the Russian Patriarch[ate] at Moscow, the Kremlin's political tool.

Only two weeks before the San Francisco conference, on 11 April 1945, a detachment of NKVD troops surrounded the St George Cathedral in Lviv and arrested Metropolitan Slipyj, two bishops, two prelates and several priests³. All the students in the city's theological seminary were driven from the school, while their professors were told that the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church had ceased to exist, that its Metropolitan was arrested and his place was to be taken by a Soviet-appointed bishop. These acts were repeated all over Western Ukraine and across the Curzon Line in Poland.⁴ At least seven bishops were arrested or were never heard from again. There is no Bishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Church still free in the area. Five hundred clergy who met to protest the action of the Soviets, were shot or arrested. Throughout the entire region, clergy and laity were killed by hundreds, while the number sent to forced labor camps ran into the thousands. Whole villages were depopulated. In the deportation, families were deliberately separated, fathers to Siberia, mothers to the brickworks of Turkestan and the children to Communist homes to be 'educated'. For the crime of being Ukrainian, the Church itself was declared a society detrimental to the welfare of the Soviet state, its members were marked down in the Soviet police files as potential "enemies of the people". As a matter of fact, with the exception of 150,000 members in Slovakia, the Ukrainian Catholic Church has been officially liquidated, its hierarchy imprisoned, its clergy dispersed and deported.

These attacks on the Soul have also had and will continue to have a serious effect on the Brain of Ukraine, for it is the families of the clergy that have traditionally supplied a large number of the intellectuals, while the priests themselves have been the leaders of the villages, their wives the heads of the charitable organizations. The religious orders ran schools, took care of much of the organized charities.

The third prong of the Soviet plan was aimed at the farmers, the large mass of independent peasants who are the repository of the tradition, folklore and music, the national language and literature, the national spirit, of Ukraine. The weapon used against this body is perhaps the most terrible of all – starvation. Between 1932 and 1933, 5,000,000 Ukrainians starved to death, an inhumanity which the 73rd Congress decried on 28 May 1934⁵. There has been an attempt to dismiss this highpoint of Soviet cruelty as an economic policy connected with the collectivization of the wheat-lands, and the elimination of the kulaks, the independent farmers, was therefore necessary. The fact is, however, that large-scale farmers in Ukraine were

few and far-between. As a Soviet writer Kossies⁶ declared in *Izvestia* on 2 December 1933, “Ukrainian nationalism is our chief danger”, and it was to eliminate that nationalism, to establish the horrifying uniformity of the Soviet state that the Ukrainian peasantry was sacrificed. The method used in this part of the plan was not at all restricted to any particular group. All suffered – men, women and children. The crop that year was ample to feed the people and livestock of Ukraine, though it had fallen off somewhat from the previous year, a decrease probably due in large measure to the struggle over collectivization. But a famine was necessary for the Soviet and so they got one to order, by plan, through an unusually high grain allotment to the state as taxes. To add to this, thousands of acres of wheat were never harvested, were left to rot in the fields. The rest was sent to government granaries to be stored there until the authorities had decided how to allocate it. Much of this crop, so vital to the lives of the Ukrainian people, ended up as exports for the creation of credits abroad.

In the face of famine on the farms, thousands abandoned the rural areas and moved into the towns to beg food. Caught there and sent back to the country, they abandoned their children in the hope that they at least might survive. In this way, 18,000 children were abandoned in Kharkiv alone. Villages of a thousand had a surviving population of a hundred; in others, half the populace was gone, and deaths in these towns ranged from 20 to 30 per day. Cannibalism became commonplace.

As C. [read instead: William] Henry Chamberlain, the Moscow correspondent of the *Christian Science Monitor*, wrote in 1933:

The Communists saw in this apathy and discouragement, sabotage and counter-revolution, and, with the ruthlessness peculiar to self-righteous idealists, they decided to let the famine run its course with the idea that it would teach the peasants a lesson. Relief was doled out to the collective farms, but on an inadequate scale and so late that many lives had already been lost. The individual peasants were left to shift for themselves; and much higher mortality rate among the individual peasants proved a most potent argument in favor of joining collective farms.

The fourth step in the process consisted in the fragmentation of the Ukrainian peoples at once by the addition to Ukraine of foreign peoples and by the dispersion of the Ukrainians throughout Eastern Europe. In this way, ethnic unity would be destroyed and nationalities mixed. Between 1920 and 1939, the population of Ukraine changed from 80% Ukrainian to

only 63.2%⁷. In the face of famine and deportation, the Ukrainian population had declined absolutely from 23.2 million to 19.6 million, while the non-Ukrainian population had increased by 5.6 million. When we consider that Ukraine once had the highest rate of population increase in Europe, around 800,000 per year, it is easy to see what the Russian policy has accomplished.

These have been the chief steps in the systematic destruction of the Ukrainian nation, in its progressive absorption within the new Soviet nation. Notably, there have been no attempts at complete annihilation, such as was the method of the German attack on the Jews. And yet, if the Soviet program succeeds completely, if the intelligentsia, the priests and the peasants can be eliminated, Ukraine will be as dead as if every Ukrainian were killed, for it will have lost that part of it which has kept and developed its culture, its beliefs, its common ideas, which have guided it and given it a soul, which, in short, made it a nation rather than a mass of people.

The mass, indiscriminate murders have not, however, been lacking – they have simply not been integral parts of the plan, but only chance variations. Thousands have been executed, untold thousands have disappeared into the certain death of Siberian labor camps.

The city of Vinnitsa might well be called the Ukrainian Dachau. In 91 graves there lie the bodies of 9,432 victims of Soviet tyranny, shot by the NKVD in about 1937 or 1938. Among the gravestones of real cemeteries, in woods, with awful irony, under a dance floor, the bodies lay from 1937 until their discovery by the Germans in 1943. Many of the victims had been reported by the Soviets as exiled to Siberia.

Ukraine has its Lidice too, in the town of Zavadka, destroyed by the Polish satellites of the Kremlin in 1946⁸. Three times, troops of the Polish Second Division attacked the town, killing men, women and children, burning houses and stealing farm animals. During the second raid, the Red commander told what was left of the town's populace:

“The same fate will be met by everyone who refuses to go to Ukraine. I therefore order that within three days the village be vacated; otherwise, I shall execute every one of you.”

– from DEATH AND DEVASTATION ON
THE CURZON LINE by Walter Dushnyck,

When the town was finally evacuated by force, there remained only 4 men among the 78 survivors. During March of the same year, nine other Ukrainian towns were attacked by the same Red unit and received more or less similar treatment.

What we have seen here is not confined to Ukraine. The plan that the Soviets used there has been and is being repeated. It is an essential part of the Soviet program for expansion, for it offers the quick way of bringing unity out of the diversity of cultures and nations that constitute the Soviet Empire. That this method brings with it indescribable suffering for millions of people has not turned them from their path. If for no other reason than this human suffering, we would have to condemn this road to unity as criminal. But there is more to it than that. This is not simply a case of mass murder. It is a case of genocide, of destruction, not of individuals only, but of a culture and a nation. Were it possible to do this even without suffering we would still be driven to condemn it, for the family of minds, the unity of ideas, of language and of customs that forms what we call a nation constitutes one of the most important of all our means of civilization and of progress. It is true that nations blend together and form new nations – we have an example of this process in our own country – but this blending consists in the pooling of benefits of superiorities that each culture possesses⁹. And it is in this way that the world advances. What then, apart from the very important question of human suffering and human rights that we find wrong with Soviet plans is the criminal waste of civilization and of culture. For the Soviet national unity is being created, not by any union of ideas and of cultures, but by the complete destruction of all cultures and of all ideas save one – the Soviet.

NOTES

¹ Verse by Volodymyr Sosiura added in pencil. Sosiura wrote the patriotic poem in 1944, during the German-Soviet war. At first the authorities praised the poem and in 1948 awarded the poet a Stalin prize, but by 1951 it was condemned for Ukrainian nationalism. The two verses in the Ukrainian original:

Не можна любити народів других, Коли ти не любиш Україну!..

² According to the 1959 census there were then a little over 40 million people. The Ukrainian SSR occupied the southwestern part of the USSR.

³ The Charter creating the United Nations was signed by the delegates of 50 countries, including the USSR and the Ukrainian SSR, at the Conference held on 25-26 April 1945.

⁴ The Curzon Line proposed by the British as a border between Poland and the Soviet state after the First World War eventually served as the basis for the post-World War II border between Poland and the USSR. The border left a large Ukrainian minority in the Polish state.

⁵ On 28 May 1934, Congressman Hamilton Fish of New York introduced a Resolution (H. Res. 309) in the House of Representatives, in Washington. The document stipulated that “several millions of the population of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic died of starvation during 1932 and 1933”. The resolution further proposed: “that the House of Representatives express its sympathy for all those who suffered from the great famine in Ukraine which has brought misery, affliction, and death to millions of peaceful and law-abiding Ukrainians; “that ... the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics ... take active steps to alleviate the terrible consequences arising from this famine, “that ... the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics Government ... place no obstacles in the way of American citizens seeking to send aid in form of money, foodstuffs, and necessities to the famine-stricken regions of Ukraine. The Resolution was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations (Resolution reproduced in *The Ukrainian Quarterly* (1978) 416-417; <http://www.artukraine.com/famineart/hamfish.htm>).

⁶ Erroneously identified by Lemkin as “writer Kossies”, Stanislav Kosior was the First Secretary of the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Ukraine (CP(b)U). In a speech delivered at a joint session of the Central Committee and the Central Control Committee of the CP(b)U (27 November 1933), Kosior stated that “at the present moment, local Ukrainian nationalism poses the main danger”.

⁷ There was no census in 1920. The official figures from the 1926, 1937 and 1939 census are different from those quoted by Lemkin. In 1926, Ukrainian SSR had 28,446,000 residents of which 22,927,000 were ethnic Ukrainians, while there were 31,195,000 ethnic Ukrainians in the USSR. Corresponding figures for 1937 are: 28,398,000, 22,213,000 and 26,421,000; and for 1939: 31,785,000, 23,362,000 and 28,111,000. The most reliable census figures were for 1926, less so for 1937 and very much doctored for 1939.

⁸ On 10 June 1942, 172 males over the age of 16 years were liquidated, the women and children deported and the village of Lidice razed to the ground in reprisal for the assassination of the Nazi dictator of Moravia, Reinhard Heydrich. Zavadka Morokhivs'ka, Sianots'kyi povit, Lemkivshchyna, now Zawadka-Morochowska, in Poland.

⁹ Lemkin had in mind the United States.