THE GLOBE AND MAIL, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1986

# Kulaks killed best workers in Ukraine

I regret that your paper thought it commendable and advisable to use almost two full pages on excerpts from Robert Conquest’s book about the “imposed famine” of 1931-1932 in the Ukraine (Nov. 29, Dec. 1).

To deal adequately with the historical and factual inaccuracies and crude political aspersions would require equal space. However, I would like to set the record straight on just a few points Mr. Conquest alludes to.

Times were difficult for the Soviet Union in the first decade following the 1917 Revolution, not least because of the hostility of the capitalist world, which sought initially to break and then totally isolate the new Soviet Government.

The years 1931 and 1932, to which Mr. Conquest basically refers, saw famine not only in the Ukraine but many other countries around the world due to an inordinate period of global bad weather. In 1931, 27 million hectares of land (nearly 60 million acres) in the Ukraine were hit by a severe drought. In 1932, those same areas, plus productive wheat areas in the Russian federation, were struck by an equally devastating drought. As a result, the grain production in the Ukraine in 1932 was 14.7 million metric tons - 3.9 million tons less than the year before.

Despite Mr. Conquest’s speculations, major steps were taken to alleviate - not exacerbate - the situation. As a result, government grain-procurement quotas from the Ukraine were reduced to 6.6 million tons in July, 1932, from 7.7 million and then when full realization of the problem set in, to 4.7 million tons. In fact, 10 million of the 14.7 million tons of grain harvested in the Ukraine stayed there, compared with 10.9 millions tons in 1931 - a relatively small drop, and certainly commensurate with the decline throughout the country given the over-all drought.

The years of drought were also the years of collectivization. There was little experience of managing large farms, machinery was scarce, the use of horses and oxen was mistakenly neglected, and the cumulative misjudgement crippled the 1932 sowing and harvest seasons.

Those who opposed collectivization in the Ukraine - the Kulaks, who were dispossessed in the process - did not do so pacifically. In 1929 alone, Kulaks and their supporters in the Ukraine murdered about 10,000 Communist Party activists, farm leaders and reform sympathizers - the most able and skillful farmers.

Sabotage and the killing of cattle and draught animals were rife. Even some Western sources admit that in the Ukraine in 1931, 25 per cent of the collective farms were the target of arson, 10 per cent had what little machinery they had sabotaged and about an equal amount of cattle poisoned, and attacks on collectivization sympathizers occurred on almost half the newly organized collective farms.

Despite initial misjudgement, disorder, violent opposition from the Kulaks and the lack of experience, collectivization did succeed. Collectivization itself did not make the situation worse, nor did it cause starvation. In fact, it produced the opposite. In 1933, after the two years of drought, the grain harvestt in the Ukraine reached 22.3 million tons.

The population statistics cited by Mr. Conquest and other recent Western media stories, of anywhere between five million and 10 million people starving to death in the Ukraine in 1931-1933, are as spurious as their claims that the famine was “imposed”. The 1929 population of the Ukraine was 30.2 million. The population figure remained at about 32 million in both 1932 and 1933.

True, times were hard and many people did suffer, especially those families whose fathers, sons and brothers were murdered by the Kulaks. But not nearly to the extent portrayed in less than scholarly publications.

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Concerning the Globe and Mail’s excerpts of Robert Conquest’s book Harvest of Sorrow and its “genocide” interpretations of the thirties famine (Nov. 29, Dec. 1):

The six photos with the articles are misrepresentations and do not portray scenes from 1932-1933 in Ukraine. They originate from the 1922 Russian famine, and their history of fraudulent application to Ukraine in 1933 is interesting.

The three photos (Nov. 29) appear in Ammede’s 1936 Human Life in Russia. The photo at the bottom left was stolen by Amend from Dr. F. Nansen’s 1922 Russian Famine booklet Information No.22 (Geneva), page 16. The photo at the bottom right, also from 1922 famine coverage, was first misused as “1933” in the Nazi organ Voelkischer Beobachter, Aug. 13, 1933. The top photo portrays an off-angle photo of a scene from page 10 of La Famine en Russie, Geneva, 1922.

In the Dec. 1 excerpt, the top and bottom-left photos are “Thomas Walker” fakes published by the Hearst press of 1935 and later used by Ammende, who claimed a different photographer and year for them. Louis Fischer exposed the Walker series in The Nation, March 13, 1935. Walker never existed. The “brothers in distress” on the right is copied from a 1922 newsreel. It has been used to portray the twenties famine both in Peter Ustinov’s Russia TV series and other publicized documentaries.

Five of the six photos do not even appear in Mr. Conquest’s book. This indicated that widespread use of fraudulent photos as 1933 evidence is not an isolated event. Since Mr. Conquest’s Harvest of Sorrow itself utilizes the photos and accounts of both the non-existent Thomas Walker and the plagiarizer Amend, his book cannot be the “meticulously researched” masterpiece claimed by its jacket notes.

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