



# FROM THEN TO NOW

## PART II

ANDRIJ SUCHOWERSKY

# 1930S UKRAINE

- Stalinism and totalitarianism
  - Stalin emerged as victor in 1927 following bittersweet power struggle within the Bolsheviks
  - Lacked writing and oratorical skill but demonstrated cunning and ruthlessness.
  - Considered peasants to be conservative and an impediment to revolutionary change
- Ukraine, at this stage, unfortunately was full of farmers...

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- ...and peasants

# 1930S UKRAINE

- Economic transformation
  - Kulaks
    - Threat to a communist Utopia as 1/125 were conservative and opposed to the new regime
  - FYP
    - Collectivization
      - Removal of the 'pernicious, bourgeois' influence of private ownership
    - 'You can't make an omlette without breaking some eggs'

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- Economic transformation
  - Progress of the FYPs was brought about by workers being pushed to limits in an atmosphere of tension and titanic struggle
  - Whilst there may have been some pride in achievement (Dnieper Hydro-electric Dam was the largest in Europe), an oppressed atmosphere predominated; unauthorized lateness and absenteeism led to withdrawal of food rations and even imprisonment
  - Moreover, frenetic pace of construction lead to confusion and ineptitude with respect to planning and efficiency
    - Factories stood empty without machines.
    - Unskilled workers ruined new machines while experienced ones sat idle

# 1930S UKRAINE

- Economic transformation
  - Ukrainians moved from their traditional country settings to the city for employment
    - Squalid conditions with overcrowding of housing.
    - Bad as it was, this was nothing to what the country peasants faced
  - Collectivization
    - Can only be described as a war on the peasantry with devastating consequences.
    - Arguably, the single most traumatic event in Ukrainian history.
    - Liquidation of Kulaks
      - Soviet misappropriation and oppression at its best
      - Personal grudges and envies
      - No peasant was safe

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- Collectivization
  - Those who resisted were dragged into streets and shot
  - Barred from collective farms
  - Deportation to Siberia
    - Taken in freight trains and dumped on the arctic wastes
    - Families
    - 850,000 deported where many, especially children died because they were weaker
  - *'Not one of them was guilty of anything but they belonged to a class that was guilty of everything'*
  - Agriculture restructure phase 1 and 2, the former being a fiasco and the latter being 'damned if do, damned if don't'
  - By 1932, collective farms accounted for 70% of farming households; by 1940 all Ukraine's peasantry belonged to 28,000 collective farms.
    - Inept management

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- Collectivization
  - Ruthlessly unrealistic quotas
  - Stalin dispatched Molotov and Kaganovich in 1931 to oversee grain procurements
  - Regular troops and OGPU units crushed villages and forcibly took their grain
- The Great Famine of 1932-33 – The Holodomor
  - Tragedy of inconceivable proportions which traumatized a nation, leaving scars to this day.
  - Central fact is that it did not have to occur
    - Grain procurements of 1932 were higher than 31 but the state systematically confiscated most of it for its own use.
  - Despite pleas from the Ukrainian SSR government Stalin demanded an increase in quotas by 44% in 1932 and the brutal fulfillment of his command sentenced millions to death in a man-made famine.

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- The Great Famine of 1932-33 – The Holodomor
  - Utter disregard for human cost
    - Party activists were authorized to go from house to house and confiscate all grain.
    - Any signs of grain taken from a collective farm termed 'socialist property' resulted in men women and children being shot
    - No grain could be given to peasants until government quotas were met
  - January 1933, Stalin sent Postyshev to force the Ukrainian Communist government into even more ruthless procurement policies
    - Gangs of party members descended on farm households in brutal raids, with floor boards torn up and searching wells for any possible remaining grain
    - Persons seen not starving were suspected of hoarding food.
  - Holodomor was at its worst in early 1933
    - A family had to survive on 1.7 kgs of grain for an entire season
    - Bark, pets, rats and garbage from the well stocked kitchens of the party members.

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- The Great Famine of 1932-33 – The Holodomor
  - *'On the battlefield, men die quickly, they fight back, they are sustained by fellowship and a sense of duty. Here I saw people dying in solitude by slow degree, dying hideously without the excuse of sacrifice for a cause. They had been trapped and left to starve, each in his home by a political decision made in a far off capital around conference and banquet tables. There was not even the consolation of inevitability to relieve the horror. The most terrifying sights were the little children with skeleton limbs dangling from ballon like abdomens. Starvation wiped every trace of youth from their faces turning them into tortured gargoyles.*
  - Stalin had a different view
    - *'A ruthless struggle is waging between the peasantry and our regime. It's a struggle to the death. It took millions of lives and a famine to show them who is master here. The collective farm system is here to stay. We have won the war'*
  - The final shocking irony
    - Stalin, displeased with the census of 1937 which showed shockingly high mortality rates, had them doctored and then the central census takers shot.

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- The Great Famine of 1932-33 – The Holodomor
  - Soviet sources conceded the demands on the Ukrainian SSR were incongruously great.
    - Ukraine accounted for 27% of grain production yet was expected to fill 38% of the quota
    - Ukrainian collective farmers were paid half of that of their Russian counterparts.
  - Holodomor as an attack on Ukrainian identity
    - Soviet author – *'Collectivization has a special task in Ukraine...to destroy the social basis of Ukrainian nationalism'*

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- The Great Famine of 1932-33 – The Holodomor

- The West's position

- The horrendous scope was stifled
- The Soviet government refused foreign aid so Westerners did not believe a famine was going on. Carefully staged inspections by Western luminaries such as George Bernhard Shaw and the former French premier Herriot led to glowing reports of well fed peasants
- Walter Duranty, a New York Times journalist based in Moscow, to curry Stalin's favour repeatedly denied in his articles claims of any famine whilst privately estimating around 10 million had perished.
  - For his 'impartial, profound and sound judgement' of dispatches from Moscow in the 1930s, he received the Pulitzer Prize.
- British Foreign Office Document:
  - *'Of course we have a certain amount of information about the famine...we don't want to make it public because the Soviet government would resent it and prejudice our relationship with them'*

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- The Great Famine of 1932-33 – The Holodomor
  - *'The scandal is not that they justified Soviet actions, but that they refused to hear about them, that they were not prepared to face the evidence.'*

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- The Great Terror
  - Stalin meant to transform the Ukrainian SSR into merely an administrative unit of the USSR and those who stood in his way were marked for liquidation
    - Intellectual elite
    - Show trials with forced confessions under psychological and physical torture
      - SVU trial
      - All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences
      - Attack on the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church
        - Metropolitan and dozens of bishops and priests were sent to labour camps.
    - 2nd wave in 1933
      - Purges of the party
      - Expulsion (generally entailing execution shortly thereafter) of any member demonstrating 'ideological mistakes and failings
      - Terror became a part of daily life for the masses and party elite

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- The Great Terror
  - Stalin suspected the Ukrainian Communist Party of secretly harbouring desires of Ukrainianization
    - Sought to 'cleanse' it, supposedly for its poor performance during collectivization
      - Placed the party as a scapegoat for the disasters of 1932-3
      - Condemned the party for its soft stance on kulaks and lack of vigilance for grain procurements
      - Rock and hard place

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- The Great Terror
  - Postyshev and Balitsky the latter being the new head of the OGPU
    - Purge the party and end Ukrainianization, regardless of the cost
    - Primary target was Skrypnyk, the commissar of education but rather than retract his support for Ukrainianization, he committed suicide.
    - 200 out of 240 writers disappeared
    - 62 out of 85 scholars were liquidated
    - Playwrights, historians, philosophers who were well known and highly regarded were not so much seen to be arrested but more 'disappeared'
    - Several hundred wandering bards (kobzarii) were invited to a theatre for a 'conference', shot and then buried.
    - *'The discovery of Skrypnyk has given us the opportunity to rid the state of Ukrainian nationalist elements'*

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- Postyshev and Balitsky the latter being the new head of the OGPU
  - Political elite were not safe
    - CPU lost 100, 000 members who also 'disappeared'
  - Show trials
  - NKVD
    - Fabricated plots and terrorist groups as an excuse to implicated wider circles of people
  - Even at a time when the threat of war was rising in Europe, Stalin had the entire military elite executed because of fear it may harbour potential opposition down the track.
    - Beginnings of signs of madness.
- Dissatisfied with the extent and speed of the purge, Stalin removed Postyshev sent 3 personal representatives.
  - Almost the entire Central Committee and Politburo of Ukraine were executed.
  - 170,000 of Ukraine's political party were purged
  - *'The party has been purged spotless'*

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- Ukraine lost all autonomy and all aspects of life centred around Moscow.
  - In fact at certain points, Stalin pondered abolishing the republic all together
  - Juxtaposition of crushing policies with propaganistic concessions to give the veil of freedom of choice
    - Re-iterated the right of republics to secede from the Union if they wished and re-assured all soviet citizens of their civil rights
    - Perverse duplicity of the above comments with the following sentiment in the midst of the horrors he orchestrated *'Life has become better, comrades, life has become gayer'*