



Anne Applebaum. *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine.* New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 2017. 496 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-385-53885-5.

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Anne Applebaum's *Red Famine* is about the famine in Ukraine in 1932-33. This book acts as a sequel to the well-known book of Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow* (1986). Applebaum's work differs from the latter mainly in that she was able to use the mass of archival documents that became accessible after the collapse of the USSR, the document collections based on them, the recent work of numerous historians in a number of countries, and new sources such as oral history. The author also received significant encouragement and support from scholars at the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute. As a result of all these factors it is much better informed than Conquest's book and provides a mass of data about a terrible catastrophe that caused millions of deaths and plays a role in Ukrainian historiography similar to the 1840s famine in Ireland, the 1915-16 deportations and massacres in Armenia, and the Holocaust in Israel.

The book contains a harrowing account of the famine, the suffering of the starving and dying, the cannibalism of the desperate, and the actions of the activists who visited Ukrainian villages to confiscate all the food of the peasants. The book also describes the efforts of the Soviet government to hide what was going on, its success in getting Western correspondents in Moscow to send fake news to their newspapers, and its failure to

stop two British journalists from telling the truth. For decades the Soviet authorities denied that there was a major famine in Ukraine in 1932-33. The silence in the USSR about the famine lasted almost to the very end of the USSR. It is one of the many Stalinist crimes (like the state terror of 1937-38) for which documentary evidence only became available after the collapse of the USSR and the archival revolution in the study of the USSR.

In order to provide the background to her story the author devotes 185 pages to the period before the famine. This is necessary to frame her interpretation of the famine. The crucial point of her interpretation is that the famine was a result of a deliberate policy aimed at destroying Ukrainian national sentiment and those who embodied or propagated it. Part of that policy was the starvation of Ukrainian peasants, and part was the state terror in Ukraine in 1933, which targeted Ukrainian cultural intellectuals and national Communists and also refugees from Poland/West Ukraine. It is certainly true that Joseph Stalin thought he was engaged in a war with the peasants, who, in his opinion, were consciously sabotaging the construction of socialism by not voluntarily delivering the required grain quotas. In view of this perceived sabotage, in a speech on November 27, 1932, Stalin stated that this sabo-

tage needed to be answered with a knockout blow. Stalin was also worried about losing the Ukraine and about the loyalty of the Ukrainian Communists. It is also true that the measures he took and the orders he gave were bound to cause the death of very many peasants. Furthermore, in 1932-33 he also pursued a multipronged policy of state terror against the population of the USSR, in particular the peasantry, which showed his indifference to human suffering.

During the famine Stalin, instead of requesting or accepting international assistance to help the starving (as was done in 1921 and 1947, respectively), or ending grain exports, explained that the "idlers" (i.e., the peasants who failed to deliver the required quantity of grain and/or did not have enough to eat) deserved to die. Moreover, the failure of Ukraine to supply the desired quantity of grain, memories of the civil war, the peasant anti-collectivization riots in 1930, and fear of potential war led to the abandonment in 1932-33 of the Ukrainization policy (the encouragement of Ukrainian culture and language) which was followed in the 1920s. This was followed by a Russification policy. This was particularly drastic in the Kuban, an area of Russia which in the 1920s had a large Ukrainian population. According to the 1926 census, 915,000 Ukrainians lived there and accounted for 61 percent of the population. By 1939 the number of Ukrainians living there had dwindled to 197,000 and they accounted for only a small proportion of the population.[1] Stalin himself changed his view of national policy in 1930-31. It evolved from a criticism of Great Russian chauvinism to a Russian nationalist position. Hence, Applebaum argues that the famine was a conscious attack on Ukraine partly inspired by Russian nationalist ideas. However, whereas we have the document signed by Stalin (and his henchmen) approving the Katyn massacre and the documents ordering the terror of 1937-38, we do not have an analogous document ordering the starvation of millions of Ukrainians in 1932-33. In addition, the Ukraini-

ans were not the only victims of starvation in the early 1930s. Badly hit were the Kazakhs, about 1.4 million of whom died, about 36 percent of their population[2]. Many Russians also starved. Where Ukrainian historians and those who sympathize with them mainly see a specifically Ukrainian tragedy, Kazakh historians see a Kazakh tragedy, and Russian historians see a tragedy of the peoples of the USSR. Applebaum's interpretation, while understandable and possible, lacks the irrefutable documentary proof which exists for Katyn and the terror of 1937-38.

An important issue in discussing this famine is the number of victims, for which numerous estimates have been made. Appelbaum uses the estimate of 3.9 million excess deaths and a demographic loss (which includes unborn children) of 4.5 million (p. 280). These figures are taken from the detailed calculations by Omelian Rudnytskyi et al. which were published in 2015 in *Canadian Studies in Population*. The figure of 3.9 million excess deaths is lower than some of the estimates that have been bandied about. However, it is higher than the estimate of 3.2 million published by the Ukrainian historian Stanislav Kulchytsky in 2005.[3] It is also higher than the estimate of 2.6 million excess deaths by the French demographers Jacques Vallin et al. in their 2002 article in *Population Studies* and in the 2012 book edited by France Meslé and Vallin (*Mortality and Causes of Death in 20th-Century Ukraine*). An important reason for the difference between the Rudnytskyi et al. estimates and those of Vallin et al. is that Rudnytskyi et al. reduce the estimated population of Ukraine in 1939 by about 800,000 to allow for the falsification of the 1939 census. Another reason is the greater decline in the birth rate during the crisis assumed by Vallin et al. According to Vallin et al. this was 1.1 million, making a demographic loss of 3.7 million. Rudnytskyi et al. conclude their analysis by drawing attention to the big regional differences in the demographic loss and the need to explain them. That would indeed be important in fully understanding the demo-

graphic crisis of 1932-33. An interesting result of the 2002 article by Vallin et al. is that their estimate of excess mortality in 1941-45 is 6.7 million, which is much higher than their estimate of the 1932-33 famine mortality. However, the huge wartime excess mortality in Ukraine (except that of Jews and Roma) gets much less literary or political attention than the smaller excess mortality caused by the 1932-33 famine, since attention to the wartime excess mortality would not serve any political purpose.

The book presents a balanced and nuanced picture of many controversial issues. For example, it points out that collectivization did have some popular support, both rural and urban. It even notices that deportation in 1930 was sometimes favorable – it saved some of its victims from the famine of 1933. Appelbaum also recognizes the existence of the Kazakh famine and the famine in parts of Russia. Similarly, while acquitting Symon Petliura (a prominent Ukrainian leader in 1918-20) himself of the charges of anti-Semitism and organizing pogroms, she notes that the same cannot be said of all his followers.

Appelbaum frames her analysis in the context of Ukrainian history. In this capacity it provides Ukraine with a tragic past, which plays an important role in state-building. Published in English, and in a well-written book, it contributes to the international recognition of Ukraine as a major European nation which was a victim of the Soviet system and subject to Russification and has an absolute right to an independent existence. However, this is not the only possible framework for a study of the famine. Economic historians, both Anglophone and Russophone, tend to see it as an episode in the industrialization of the USSR.[4] They pay attention to the low harvests in 1931 and 1932 and make comparisons with the famines of 1727-28 and 1891-92. In their analysis the specific Ukrainian element tends to disappear. Specialists in famines tend to see it as an important twentieth-century famine which can be com-

pared, for example, to the Finnish famine of 1868, the Bengal famine of 1943, or the famine in Sichuan in 1960, in order to understand famines in general. If Ukraine were to join the Eurasian Economic Union then future historians might see the Soviet famines of 1931-34 as Eurasian disasters.

This very well-informed and very readable book will be useful for anyone interested in Ukraine past or present, the history of the USSR, twentieth-century history, famines, or the use of national disasters in state-building. However, its interpretation is based on circumstantial evidence and is possible but unproven.

Notes

[1]. For these figures see Michael Ellman, "Stalin and the Soviet Famine of 1932-33 Revisited," *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 4 (2007): 683.

[2]. R. W. Davies and Stephen G. Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger: Soviet Agriculture, 1931-1933* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 415; Niccolò Pianciola, "Famine in the Steppe: The Collectivization of Agriculture and the Kazak Herdsmen, 1928-1934" *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 45, nos. 1 and 2 (2004): 137.

[3]. Stanislav Kulchytsky, *Golod 1932-1933 gg v Ukraine kak genotsid* (Kyiv: Institute of Ukrainian History, 2005), 196.

[4]. Davies and Wheatcroft, *Years of Hunger*; S. Nefedov, *Uroven' zhizni naseleniia i agrarnoe razvitie Rossii v 1900-1940 godakh* (Moscow: Delo, 2017).

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