

The Role of Leadership Perceptions and of Intent in the Soviet Famine of 1931 – 1934

MICHAEL ELLMAN

[Lenin in 1891–92] spoke out sharply and definitely against feeding the starving. His position, to the extent that I can now remember it, and I remember it well since I frequently argued with him about it, was as follows. The famine is the direct result of a definite social system. While that system exists such famines are inevitable. To eliminate famines is possible, but only by destroying this system. Being in this sense inevitable, the current famine is playing the role of a progressive factor. By destroying the peasant economy and driving the peasant from the country to the town, the famine creates a proletariat and facilitates the industrialisation of the region, which is progressive. Furthermore the famine can and should be a progressive factor not only economically. It will force the peasant to reflect on the bases of the capitalist system, demolish faith in the tsar and tsarism, and consequently in due course make the victory of the revolution easier... Psychologically all this talk about feeding the starving and so on essentially reflects the usual sugary sentimentality of our intelligentsia.

V.Vodovozov (1925)¹

The grain procurements are a lever with the help of which we achieve the socialist re-education of the collective farmer. We teach him to think differently, no longer as the owner of grain but as a participant in socialist competition, consciously and in a disciplined way

relating to his obligations to the proletarian state. The grain procurements are that part of our work by which we take account of the collective farmer... and put the peasant in the channel of proletarian discipline.

Speaker at the June 1933 plenum of the Lower Volga *kraikom*²

IT HAS LONG BEEN DEBATED whether the victims of the Soviet famine of the early 1930s died due to a *conscious policy* of starvation or whether they were *unintended* victims of unfavourable natural conditions and policies aimed at other goals. Although the difference was of no importance for the unfortunate victims, it is of considerable importance for historians. In their recent monograph, Davies & Wheatcroft, on the basis of detailed study of the sources—many of them previously unused archival documents—and an enviable knowledge of the period, come down strongly on the ‘unintentional’ side.³ Their argument combines structural and conjunctural aspects. They argue that the structural factor was the decision to industrialise this peasant country at breakneck speed, which led to the state’s rapidly growing need for grain to feed the towns and the army, and to finance imports of industrial equipment.⁴ The conjunctural factor was two successive bad harvests (1931

and 1932). The first bad harvest was caused by a drought. The second was also largely caused by unfavourable weather whose effects were worsened by the decline in the number of horses.⁵ Although foolish policy (neglect of crop rotation and the attempt to socialise livestock rapidly and completely) worsened the situation, as did grain exports, and the failure to obtain foreign assistance contrasted with policy in 1891–92,

1921–22, 1941–45 and 1946–47, the *intention* was not to starve the peasantry. In fact the famine was unexpected and undesirable. In evaluating the situation one has to take account of the fact that the policy makers were poorly educated people with little knowledge of agriculture. Similarly, in his useful and informative study of the Kazakh famine, Pianciola also supports the ‘unintentional’ interpretation.⁷

The Davies & Wheatcroft interpretation is powerful, and there is much evidence to support it. Unlike much writing on this topic it is also numerate, with extensive statistical data to back it up. However, is it *complete*? Is it really the case that no peasants were deliberately starved to death? The fact that no document has been found in which Stalin explicitly orders starvation is not by itself conclusive. Discussing the vexed question of Stalin’s possible role in the Kirov assassination, Khlevnyuk sensibly remarked that it is unlikely that the question can be settled by explicit documentary evidence, since ‘assassinations are planned in strict secrecy and instructions for them are not given on headed paper’.⁸ Hence it is necessary not just to consider whether or not explicit instructions to use starvation as a weapon in the grain procurement drives can be found, but also to consider weaker evidence.

In order to understand the situation in 1932–33 it is necessary to look closely not only at the impersonal structural and agronomical factors on which Davies & Wheatcroft concentrate but also at the *perception* of the situation by the *vozhd* himself. In his well known correspondence with Sholokhov (which remained unpublished for decades and the Khrushchevite partial publication of which was distorted to blacken Stalin), Stalin argued that the peasants were waging war against Soviet power with such weapons as starvation. The crucial passage reads: ‘the esteemed grain growers of your region (and not only your region) carried out a sit-down strike (sabotage!) and would not have minded leaving the workers and the Red Army without bread. The fact that the sabotage was quiet and apparently harmless (bloodless) does not alter the fact that the esteemed grain growers were basically waging a “quiet” war against Soviet power. A war by starvation (*voyna na izmor*), dear com. Sholokhov. . .’⁹ In other words, the first person to accuse people of deliberately starving other people was Stalin himself—not his various later critics. (We exclude here the peasants at that time, many of whom seem to have suspected or believed that the starvation was deliberate.¹⁰) This is a factor of some importance. It can be examined from both a propaganda and a psychological point of view.

In his study of publicity and propaganda Mucchielli drew attention to the role in political propaganda of ‘accusation in a mirror’.¹¹ ‘This consists in imputing to the opponents one’s own intentions, i.e. the actions which one is planning oneself. It is like someone who is about to launch a war declaring his peaceful intentions and accusing his enemy of warmongering, or like someone who is using terror accusing the enemy of using terror. The advantages of accusation in a mirror are numerous. Apart from the (undeserved) saintly image one gains (*Outre l’auréole que l’on en retire* à contrario), one deprives the enemy of his arguments and develops in the listeners and naïve souls

the conviction that, in the face of such opponents, honest people find themselves acting in *self-defence*, and everyone should support the “just cause”. In other words, ‘accusation in a mirror’ is a propaganda technique in which the perpetrators of certain actions (war, terror, genocide etc.) ascribe those actions to their enemies and see their own actions as self-defence.

The idea of ‘accusation in a mirror’ has not remained confined to books but has been consciously used by propagandists/spin-doctors in recent conflicts. In her study of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, Forges explained the use in that catastrophe of ‘accusation in a mirror’.¹² One of the propagandists of the Rwanda genocide formulated two techniques to win support. ‘The propagandist calls his second proposal “Accusation in a mirror”, meaning his colleagues should impute to enemies exactly what they and their own party are planning to do. He explains “In this way, the party which is using terror will accuse the enemy of using terror”. With such a tactic, propagandists can persuade listeners and “honest people” that they are being attacked and are justified in taking whatever measures are necessary “for legitimate [self-] defence”’.¹³

Not only do evil-doers use ‘accusation in a mirror’ as a propaganda weapon, they frequently actually believe it themselves. It is well known that evil-doers tend to see their own actions as reprisals for actions against them. As Baumeister has pointed out, what to outside observers appears to be unjustified cruelty frequently appears to the perpetrators as a response to attacks on them.¹⁴

Hence, if we apply the logic of Mucchielli, the anonymous propagandist cited by Forges, and of Baumeister, we might consider Stalin’s accusation of the use of starvation by his enemies as ‘an accusation in a mirror’. The accusation would mean that it was actually he himself who was using starvation as a weapon but that he wished to transfer the blame for it to his enemies.¹⁵

Is it plausible to apply ‘accusation in a mirror’ to Stalin? Are there any other examples which can be interpreted as ascription by him of his own crimes to others? Are there other cases where Stalin uses ‘accusation in a mirror’? If so, that would strengthen the idea that this is a reasonable way of interpreting the extract from the Stalin–Sholokhov correspondence cited above.

There are, in fact, a number of such cases. They include his speech at the concluding session of the February–March Plenum (1937), the 17 November 1938 decree ending the terror, his 1939 telegram justifying torture and his response to accusations about the Katyn massacre.

In his speech at the concluding session of the February–March (1937) Plenum Stalin said, *inter alia*, ‘Naïve people may think that between them [i.e. the bourgeois states], states with the same system, there exist only good relations. But only naïve people think like that. In actual fact, relations between them are very far from good neighbourly relations. It is as certain as two times two equals four that bourgeois states send to each other’s rear their spies, wreckers and saboteurs, and sometimes also murderers, giving them the task of infiltrating institutions and enterprises of these states and there creating their network, so that when the time comes they will blow up their rear, in order to weaken them and undermine their power’.¹⁶ It would indeed be naïve to ignore the intelligence gathering, planting of agents and murders carried out by bourgeois states.¹⁷ Nevertheless, it seems that this passage is also an example of an

'accusation in a mirror'. It was the USSR which was most active in sending murderers to other countries. In 1930–40 the killing of the ROVS leaders Kutepov and Miller, the liquidation of the POUM leadership in Catalonia, the assassination of the OUN leader Konovalets, the killing of Ignacy Reiss, the murder of the Fourth International secretary Klement, the assassination of Trotsky etc. were all carried out by Soviet murderers sent to other countries by the Soviet leadership. As for sending spies to infiltrate other countries' institutions and enterprises, the USSR was notorious for just that.¹⁸

Another example concerns Stalin's ending of the terror in November 1938. According to the decree of Sovnarkom and the CC of 17 November 1938 which ended the terror, many of the arrests during it were a result of 'enemies of the people and spies for foreign intelligence, who made their way into the organs of the NKVD at the centre and in the localities, and who continued to carry out their subversive work, striving by all means to muddle up the investigative and information-collecting work, consciously perverting Soviet laws, carrying out mass and unfounded arrests'. After listing various 'defects' in the work of the NKVD during the period of the terror, the decree concluded that 'All these absolutely unacceptable defects in the work of the organs of the NKVD and the Procuracy were only possible because the enemies of the people who made their way into the organs of the NKVD and the Procuracy tried in every way to tear the work of the organs of the NKVD and Procuracy away from the party organs, to escape from party control and leadership, and in this way make it easier for themselves and their accomplices to continue their anti-Soviet subversive activity'.¹⁹ It is clear that, in these passages, Stalin ascribes the consequences of his own orders to 'enemies of the people'. The NKVD and the Procuracy had not 'escaped from party control'. They had faithfully carried out Stalin's orders. The 'mass operations' had not been ordered by Stalin's opponents in cahoots with foreign intelligence services but by Stalin himself.²⁰

A similar, but not identical, case is Stalin's notorious telegram of 10 January 1939 justifying torture. In the winter of 1938–39 local party and procuracy bodies were looking into the activities of the NKVD in 1937–38. It was necessary to inform them that there had been some wrongful arrests, some people needed to be rehabilitated, many *chekisty* themselves needed to be arrested, and that generally 'excesses' needed to be corrected. However, torture itself was not an 'excess' but perfectly legitimate. In fact, it had been authorised by the leadership in 1937²¹ and could continue to be used with full official authorisation ('in exceptional cases'). Stalin argued that 'It is well known that all bourgeois intelligence services use torture (*fizicheskoe vozdeistvie*) on representatives of the socialist proletariat, and use it in the most varied forms. The question arises: why should socialist intelligence be more humane in relation to agents of the bourgeoisie, the enemies of the working class and the collective farmers?'²² Although in this case Stalin explicitly recognised his use of torture, he considered it fully justified because the enemy had long used it on a large scale, whereas he had only recently begun using it and then only 'in exceptional cases'. This is a clear case of Stalin accusing his enemies of doing what in fact he himself had been doing on a large scale for some time.

After authorising the Katyn massacre, when accused by the Polish government in exile and by the Nazis of doing so, Stalin indignantly denied it and blamed it on the

Nazis. This was ‘proven’ by an ‘expert commission’ which investigated the matter. This is a clear example of Stalin blaming his crimes on his enemies, who, although they were indeed guilty of numerous ghastly massacres, were not guilty of this one, for which he was responsible.

Hence it would seem that ‘accusation in a mirror’, whereby Stalin ascribed his crimes to his enemies, was a common propaganda and psychological mechanism for him. This strengthens the case for interpreting the passage in the Stalin – Sholokhov correspondence as an ‘accusation in a mirror’.

There would be nothing surprising or out of character about Stalin’s use of starvation. Stalin explicitly stated that he was engaged in a ‘war’ (started naturally—in his understanding—by his peasant enemies), and in a war one aims to kill or otherwise overcome one’s enemies. Stalin’s use of arrests, deportations and shootings in his war against the peasants is well known and not disputed. It seems that in 1930–33 about three million peasants were repressed. Information about their bureaucratic classification is set out in Table 1.

The OGPU did not just deport ‘enemies’ or send them to camps, it also shot them. According to OGPU data, approximately 20,000 people were shot by the OGPU in

1930 and about 11,000 in 1931 (these deaths are included in Table 1). Compared with deportation, starvation might be considered a more efficient way of removing ‘class enemies’. It saved having to mobilise detachments of *chekisty*, using scarce railway capacity, mobilising scarce horses and constructing additional boats.²⁴ It also saved having to provide initial food supplies, scarce building materials and agricultural tools for the victims. In addition, it could be used in those months when the Siberian rivers were frozen and could not be used for transporting people. Furthermore, since there was surplus rural population,²⁵ killing peasants by starvation did not produce any economic losses. In fact, it simply reduced ‘unnecessary’ rural consumption, which ‘improved’ the grain balance and was a gain from the state’s point of view.²⁶

An interpretation which stresses policy and intent rather than exogenous factors (such as the weather) was recently offered by Danilov & Zelenin.²⁷ They also draw attention to the passage in the Stalin – Sholokhov correspondence cited in this article. They argue that Stalin aimed both to punish the peasants by starvation for their ‘sabotage’, about which he complained in his correspondence with Sholokhov,²⁸ and to take the grain necessary for his policies of industrialisation (the structural factor in the explanation of Davies & Wheatcroft) and the build-up of defence capabilities. They characterise Stalin’s policies in Kazakhstan as ‘in essence criminal acts’. They also quote a writer who referred to the famine in Ukraine as ‘genocide’, although they prefer to use the term to apply also to Kazakhstan and Russia. Their article stresses Stalin’s use of harsh measures (e.g. forbidding migration from the most affected regions) and repression (arrest, deportation) against the peasantry. They argue that ‘... there is a whole chain of *interconnected and interdependent Stalinist actions* (fully or partially conscious) to organise the “great famine”’. Other policies, in their opinion, could have avoided mass starvation.²⁹ Unfortunately, however, they accept Stalin’s view that the 1932 harvest was better than the 1931 harvest, and fail to consider the Davies & Wheatcroft view that the 1932 harvest was worse than the already very bad 1931 harvest.³⁰ This makes it impossible for them to consider

TABLE 1
PEASANTS REPRESSED IN 1930 – 1933

1. Category I 'kulaks' arrested January–September 1930	283,717	^a
2. Total number condemned on OGPU cases in 1931–33	562,279	^b
3. Category II 'kulaks' deported in January 1930–September 1931	1,803,392	^c
4. Category III 'kulaks' resettled in 1930	c.250,000	^d
5. 1932–33 deportees who arrived alive	339,327	^e
Non-peasants in rows 2 and 5, say	c.200,000	^f
Total	3,000,000	^g

^a Some of these were released. According to an OGPU report, of the 140,724 arrested up to 15 April, 9,333 (i.e. 6.6%) were released. See *Sovetskaya derevnya glazami VChK-OGPU-NKVD*, vol. 3, book 1 (Moscow, 2003), p. 484. According to OGPU statistics, the majority of the Category I arrestees were not actually 'kulaks'. The majority were classified as 'other anti-socialist elements' and 'churchgoers'. See *Sovetskaya derevnya glazami...*, vol. 3, book 1, p. 522.

^b This figure comes from the Pavlov report (see note 23). The number arrested was much larger — 1,394,754.

^c *Naselenie Rossii v XX veke*, vol 1 (Moscow, 2000), chapter XIII; Davies & Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger...*, p. 46; *Sovetskaya derevnya glazami...*, vol. 3, book 1, p. 771.

^d In the words of an OGPU document of 17 November 1930 (*Tragediya sovetskoi derevni*, vol. 2, p. 708) 'according to the available incomplete data' the number of Category IIIs by then resettled within their regions was 42,708 families or 220,000 persons. According to Polyansky, *Ne po svoe i vole...* (Moscow, 2001), p. 69,

OGPU data state that, by August 1930, in 11 regions of the USSR 51,889 families of Category IIIs, i.e. approximately 250,000 persons, had been resettled within their regions. A precise source for this statement is not given. It is often assumed that there were no Category IIIs after 1930. This is not so. For example, in June 1931 the presidium of a *raïspolkomin* in what from 1 December 2005 will be Perm' *krai* dekulakised someone who was specifically condemned 'to resettlement as a Category III' (*vyselit' po III kategorii*). See *Politicheskie repressii v Prikam'e 1918–1980 gg.* (Perm', 2004), pp. 100–101. Whether the number of Category IIIs resettled in 1931 was quantitatively significant appears currently to be unknown.

^e *Naselenie Rossii v XX veke*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 2000), p. 281. Some of these were not peasants but urban marginals deported in connection with the introduction of the passport system. On the other hand, peasants and their family members who died en route are excluded from this figure. Furthermore, many of the urban marginals were former peasants.

^f This is a very rough figure which was derived as follows. The last year before the use of 'extraordinary' measures against the peasantry was 1927. In that year the state security organs condemned 26,036 people. If one assumes that this was a 'normal' level of repression, and that all of them were urban, then the total number of peasants repressed in 1931–33 should be reduced by $3 \times 26,036$ to allow for the non-peasants repressed. Allowing for some specific categories of non-peasant rural arrestees in 1931–33 (e.g. priests,

agronomists, teachers), also allowing for increased urban repression in this period, and rounding upwards, produces a figure of c.200,000.

^g This figure excludes peasants arrested by the OGPU in 1931–33 but not sentenced and released or handed over to other bodies; peasants condemned by the OGPU in 1930 but not classified as Categories I, II or III; 1931 Category IIIs; peasants who fled to the towns in 1930–33; 1932–33 deportees who died en route; and Kazakhs who fled abroad or to other parts of the USSR. It also excludes ordinary police arrests. On the other hand, it includes Category Is who were released after arrest, peasant children who were deported with their families and then allowed to return to relatives in their native villages, and Category IIs and IIIs who quickly escaped from their new settlements. It should be noted that it would be a mistake simply to add this figure to the Davies & Wheatcroft estimate of 5.7 million famine deaths to arrive at a figure of $5.7 + 3 = 8.7$ million 'victims of famine and repression'. This would involve double counting the excess deaths in the OGPU system (approximately 300,000 according to Davies & Wheatcroft). Taking account of this, and also of the repression of non-peasants in this period, an estimate of 'about eight and a half million' victims of famine and repression in 1930–33 seems the best currently available.

whether there might not have been a combination of intent with exogenous factors. In this, they follow the unfortunate 'either...or' tradition. Maybe it would be better to see the 1931–34 famine as a result of a combination of structural and conjunctural factors. Two structural factors were of importance, one political and the other

economic. The political structural factor was the communist victory in the Civil War and the resulting communist dictatorship. The economic structural factor was the adoption of the tribute model of rapid industrialisation. On the conjunctural level, the key political factor was Stalin's victory in the inner-party struggle. Economically, a particularly important conjunctural factor was two successive bad harvests. Another conjunctural factor was Stalin's intention to punish the peasants for their 'sabotage' by starvation. Another conjunctural factor was the advantages of starvation over deportation in eliminating 'class enemies'.

The idea of Danilov & Zelenin, and of Kondrashin & Penner—that one of the motives for Stalin's actions in 1932–33 was to punish the peasants for their 'crimes'—certainly fits in with the logic of the situation as perceived by the Stalinists. In hierarchical organisations (the family, schools, armies, society as a whole), superiors (parents, teachers, officers, judges) punish inferiors (children, pupils, soldiers, criminals) who violate accepted norms of behaviour. They expect this to improve the behaviour of the inferiors concerned. According to the Stalinists, the peasants, who underfulfilled their procurement quotas and required the state to devote great efforts to procurement activities, were thereby guilty of major crimes:

'sabotage' and 'waging war against Soviet power'. The 'natural' response to these offences was punishment, as in any family, school, army or society. From a Stalinist perspective, using against the peasants the weapon—starvation—which according to the Stalinists the peasants were using against the workers and Red Army, would have been poetic justice. The *vozhd'* may well have thought, like a stern father in a patriarchal household beating an unruly child, a teacher using corporal punishment, an NCO punishing 'impudent' soldiers, a judge sentencing someone to death or the authors of the New Testament (*Hebrews*, 12.6–12.11),³¹ that harsh punishment would discourage bad behaviour (failure to deliver the planned grain procurements) and instill the virtues of obedience and hard work.³² The logic of socialisation in an authoritarian milieu, the measures which the party leadership took (the decree of 7 August, the ban on migration from Ukraine and the North Caucasus) and the failure of the party leadership to do very much itself to lessen the burden of procurements,³³ to provide extensive famine relief,³⁴ to reduce sufficiently grain exports,³⁵ to import grain³⁶ or to appeal for foreign assistance, combined with the extremely grave criminal accusations which the party leadership made against the peasants, together form a whole. While certainly not proof, many will regard it as *circumstantial evidence* of the use of starvation as a punishment, i.e. as a deliberate political instrument. Furthermore, as stern fathers, teachers, NCOs, judges or the author of *Hebrews* would expect, it may well have been successful in raising labour discipline. In April 1933 a memorandum sent to Stalin and Molotov from the Dnepropetrovsk region reported that 'The attitude of the collective farmers this year (in the sense of their readiness to struggle for the harvest) is incomparably better not only than last year but also than in preceding years. The causes of this are a) the understanding that... bad work in the *kolkhoz* leads to hunger...'.³⁷ Similarly, in the North Caucasus, agricultural labour productivity in 1933 seems to have been much better than in 1932 as a result of peasant realisation that there was no viable alternative to obedience and that failure to carry out orders would lead to death from starvation.³⁸

The idea that the party leadership regarded the famine as having a positive educational role in teaching the peasants to work well in the collective farms has also been argued by Kul'cyc'kyj.³⁹ He cited in its support a report by Kosior to Stalin of 15 March 1933. In this report (written at the height of the famine) Kosior explained that the party's educational efforts were not yet entirely successful. 'The unsatisfactory

preparation for sowing in the worst affected regions shows that the hunger has not yet taught many collective farmers good sense (*umii-razumii*) [i.e. the need to work well on the collective farm fields]'.⁴⁰ The fact that dead and dying farmers were physically unable to work at sowing is not mentioned. What is mentioned is the assumed motivating effect of hunger on peasant labour. Despite the incomplete impact of their education on the peasants' work effort, Kosior saw a positive aspect of the party's teaching—the peasants were gradually coming to realise that the reason for the famine was not that the authorities had taken the grain away but that the peasants were guilty of poor work, of not saving the grain, and of pilfering. This indicates that, at the height of the famine, the party leadership regarded hunger as a stick that would teach the peasants the need for conscientious work in the collective farm fields.

There was nothing scrinal in this approach, which is familiar from the British industrial revolution. In 1785, in his *Dissertation on the Poor Laws*, William Townsend argued that 'Hunger will tame the fiercest animals; it will teach decency and civility, obedience and subjection, to the most perverse. In general it is only hunger which can spur and goad them [the poor] on to labour. . .'.⁴¹ It was perhaps natural that when embarking on their industrial revolution the Soviet leaders should adopt some of the attitudes of the British ruling class during their industrial revolution.

The positive consequences of the grain procurements and (when combined with two bad harvests) resulting famine in disciplining and re-educating the peasants was common currency in Bolshevik circles in 1933. This is shown, for example, by the quotation from a 1933 party meeting which heads this article.

Stalin, who appears from his letter to Sholokhov of 6 May 1933 to have understood the misery in the countryside to be a result of a sit-down strike by the peasants and the necessary response to it of the authorities, could, after the harvest of 1933 and the improved procurements of that year, look back on a successful policy of strike breaking. Like Mrs. Thatcher breaking the miners' strike, although at enormously greater cost, Stalin had shown that what the leadership regarded as a necessary and correct policy would not be changed by opposition from what were officially regarded as reactionary forces.

Danilov & Zelenin also cite Stalin's speech of 27 November 1932 at a joint meeting of the Politburo and the Presidium of the Central Control Commission.⁴² There he argued that the difficulties with grain procurement were caused by saboteurs and wreckers, and by the too soft attitude of many rural officials to the collective and state farms. He added that even some collective farmers were opposed to Soviet power and supported the wreckers. ('Confirmation' of all these statements can be found in the 'information' which the state security organs sent to the leadership.⁴³) Stalin concluded that 'It would be stupid if communists . . . did not answer this blow by some collective farmers and collective farms by a knockout blow'. Danilov & Zelenin conclude from these passages that in late 1932 Stalin ascribed the grain collection difficulties to sabotage and wrecking by the peasants, that he responded to his own

understanding of the situation by mass repression and that many of the starvation victims were victims of this repression. Stalin's 27 November 1932 speech, of course, is certainly not *proof* of the use of starvation as a weapon, but it is evidence of Stalin's intention to deal the peasants an unspecified 'knockout blow'. Many prosecutors and some juries would consider it —delivered as it was at a time of widespread starvation and shortly before the peak of the famine—as at any rate *circumstantial evidence* of the intentional use of starvation as a weapon in the war against the peasants.

It seems very likely that the 'knockout blow' Stalin planned included (and possibly comprised exclusively) further mass deportations. In early 1933 a variety of figures for deportations that year were bandied about in the leadership. In January–February 1933 there was talk about deporting three million people, a figure which was soon reduced to two million people, one million to Siberia and one million to Kazakhstan.⁴⁴ In his telegram to Stalin of 10 February 1933 Eikhe (the West Siberian *kraikom* secretary) explained that this was entirely unrealistic. On 10 March 1933 the Politburo adopted a preliminary decision to deport 'only' one million people, 500,000 to Kazakhstan and 500,000 to Siberia. On 1 April 1933 the Politburo approved the detailed plan based on these figures. The actual number deported to West Siberia in

1933 seems to have been 132,000.⁴⁵ The total number deported in 1933 seems to have been 208,000. Although this is a much smaller number than those deported in 1930–31, and not all of them were peasants (some were urban marginals and criminals), it is a not insignificant number. Furthermore, some of the urban marginals and criminals will have been former peasants who had fled to the towns. Mass deportations, under the conditions prevailing in the USSR at the time, inevitably led to high mortality en route and in the new settlements.

In addition to dealing the 'class enemies' a right hook of mass deportations, Stalin may also have intended to deliver a left hook of starvation in their villages. Given the difficulties of mass deportation and the resistance to it of local officials in the recipient regions, starvation would have had its attractions as a more efficient way of removing 'class enemies'. Perhaps the discrepancy between the 1 April 1933 plan for 1933 deportations and the much reduced actual number of deportations in 1933 partly reflected the success of this alternative method of dealing with recalcitrant peasants.⁴⁷ We know that Stalin was concerned in this period about raising the efficiency of repression. On 8 May 1933 Stalin and Molotov sent their well known instruction to reduce the number of mouths in prison and put some of the prisoners to productive work in 'special settlements' and the Gulag.⁴⁸

The willingness of the party leadership to plan huge deportations in 1933, the actual deportations, the reduction in deportation targets as the number of famine deaths rose, and the party leadership's concern for the efficiency of repression could also be considered *circumstantial evidence* for the 'intentional' interpretation. One could argue that, in 1933, Stalin's goal was to eliminate the 'class enemies'; that the main initial weapon to achieve this was mass deportations but that he soon realised that starvation was more efficient, and hence substituted that policy for the earlier deportation plans, which were drastically scaled back.⁴⁹

The non-specialist reader, puzzled by the attitude of the party leadership to the famine, should bear in mind that it inherited from Lenin an attitude to famines very different both from that of Alexander III in 1891 and from that of contemporary

NGOs and their supporters. There were two reasons for this. First, Bolsheviks judged famines from the standpoint of the historical process. Lenin, then a young man of 21, regarded the famine of 1891–92 (or possibly just its consequences) as progressive. As explained in the first quotation which heads this article, it contributed, in his analysis, to undermining pre-capitalist relations of production, facilitated capitalist industrialisation and reduced support for tsarism, all of which contributed to the ultimate victory of socialism. Hence the efforts of those involved in his local anti-famine NGO were, objectively considered, mere ‘sugary sentimentality’, to which he was opposed. Similarly, Stalin seems to have considered the famine of the early 1930s (or possibly just its consequences) as progressive. It contributed to the industrialisation of the USSR and the building of socialism. As he explained in his speech of 4 May 1935:

You know that we received as an inheritance from the past a technically backward and impoverished ruined country. Ruined by four years of imperialist war, ruined again by three years of civil war, a country with a semi-literate population, with a low technical level, with some islands of industry which were lost in a sea of tiny peasant farms—that was the country we received as a legacy from the past. The task was to transform this mediaeval and dark country into a country of modern industry and mechanised agriculture. A task, you can understand, serious and difficult. The issue was as follows: either we solve this task quickly and strengthen socialism in our country; or we don't solve it and then our country, which is technologically weak and culturally backward, would lose its independence and become an object for the games of imperialist powers. . .

It was necessary to create a first class industry. It was necessary to direct this industry so that it could raise the technological level not only of industry but also of agriculture and of our railways. *For this it was necessary to make sacrifices and carry out the strictest economies. It was necessary to economise also on food. . . in order to accumulate the necessary resources for the creation of industry. There was no alternative way of getting rid of our technological famine.* Lenin taught us this, and in this matter we followed in Lenin's footsteps. . .⁵⁰

Stalin's ‘necessary cost’ argument was repeated by some Western historians. For example, Carr wrote that, while he deplored the brutalities and abuses of collectivisation, he nevertheless regarded it ‘as an unavoidable part of the cost of a desirable and necessary policy of industrialisation’.⁵¹

Second, Bolsheviks believed in the class struggle, and used food supply as an instrument in that struggle. Hence access to food was sharply differentiated by class, with priority for workers and their interests. Initially this was intended to benefit manual workers in the short run, but increasingly it focused on the needs of the Soviet industrialisation programme, which was considered to embody the long-run interests of the working class. The largest rations initially went to workers engaged in heavy manual labour, and the smallest to ‘non-working elements’. Furthermore, ‘class enemies’ frequently received no rations at all. They were left to fend for themselves or starve. For example, in September 1918 the People's Commissariat of Social Provision announced the ending of rations for ‘all kulak and bourgeois elements in the towns and the countryside’.⁵² Similarly, in November 1930 a decree of the CC and SNK barred *lishentsy* and kulaks from the consumer cooperatives, in effect excluding them from the rationing system.⁵³ Similarly, in ‘petty-bourgeois’ Odessa in 1933 more than half the population seems to have been excluded from the national rationing system.⁵⁴

The Bolsheviks did not accept that under conditions of food shortage everyone had a right to food. They gave priority to the class struggle. Just as the British at Dunkirk in 1940 evacuated the fit and abandoned the stretcher cases, so the Bolsheviks attempted to use national resources to feed the workers—particularly those in Moscow and Leningrad, coal miners, the major industrial centres, the construction sites of the first five-year plan, shock workers and experienced workers, and the engineers and *nomenklatura* who managed their work—and left the rest, especially the class enemies', to local resources, self-provision or starvation.⁵⁵

The view that large numbers of deaths may be necessary and desirable to achieve victory in war is widespread among governments. In World War II the British government considered the large number of German civilian deaths from terror bombing of German cities (mainly working class housing) a necessary and desirable method of achieving victory. Similarly, the US government regarded the nuclear incineration of the inhabitants of two Japanese cities as a necessary and desirable method of achieving victory. The USSR in the early 1930s was not engaged in an international war but was engaged, in the perception of its leaders, in a fierce class war with a ruthless and determined enemy which used starvation, murder, beatings and arson as weapons. In 1930, just in the Urals region (*oblast'*) in the period 1 January to 10 November, the state security organs recorded 866 cases of 'kulak terror'.⁵⁶ According to a report by the Secret-Political department of the OGPU of October 1931, in the first nine months of 1931 alone, in the USSR as a whole there had been more than 6,000 acts of 'kulak terror'.⁵⁷ When Kaganovich toured the North Caucasus in the winter of 1932–33 he 'found' that 'The kulaks' class struggle is taking on the form of barbaric terror: pouring petrol on and setting fire to a representative of the *kraikom*, repeatedly beating and humiliating a woman deputy chair of a rural soviet'.⁵⁸ To illustrate the role of wrecking in causing the famine, Kosior informed Stalin in his report of 15 March 1933 that in the Kiev region the worst affected areas were 'a group of white-church districts'.⁵⁹ Since, in the opinion of the party leadership, the famine had been caused by enemies and many of those dying were enemies, it had little sympathy for the victims. The Stalinists did not consider all the famine victims as people with rights and loved ones. They perceived many of them as fierce class enemies of various kinds—kulaks, saboteurs, speculators, wreckers, churchgoers or anti-socialist elements, i.e. counter-revolutionaries whose elimination was necessary for the building of socialism and for industrialisation.⁶⁰

As for Ukraine, there was a serious danger, in Stalin's perception, that poor leadership would lead to losing the war against the counter-revolutionaries there. As Stalin put it in a message to Kaganovich of 11 August 1932, after criticising the Ukrainian leadership, 'If we don't make an effort now to improve the situation in Ukraine we may lose Ukraine'. The situation was worsened in Stalin's view by the way the Ukrainisation policy had been applied, which had strengthened the anti-Soviet elements in both Ukraine and Russia (e.g. the North Caucasus).⁶¹ Hence the Ukrainian leadership required strengthening, e.g. by sending senior really-Bolshevik emissaries (Molotov and Kaganovich), and the Ukrainisation policy required radical changes. What recent research has found in the archives is *not* a conscious policy of genocide against Ukraine. Instead, what has been found concerning Ukraine is a combination of two factors. First, the general all-Union policies of squeezing

agriculture and punishing the peasants, which had their proportionately worst demographic effects in Kazakhstan but which affected the whole country, particularly the normally grain surplus areas (such as Ukraine) which had to provide the crucial grain procurements. Second, the difficulties of meeting Stalin's Ukrainian grain procurement targets being interpreted by Stalin as a phenomenon facilitated by the

way in which the Ukrainisation policy had been applied.⁶² (Hence the radical changes in this policy from December 1932 onwards.) This emphasises the importance of understanding the perceptions of the *vozhd'* in interpreting Soviet history in the Stalin period.

The view that, in addition to deportation and shooting, Stalin used starvation in his war against the peasants does not say anything about the number of victims of the starvation policy—if one existed. It is entirely possible that the factors stressed by Davies & Wheatcroft account for the overwhelming majority of the deaths and the intended deaths were only a small—possibly very small—proportion of them. After all, the number of deaths from one of Stalin's other weapons in his war against the peasantry—shooting—was tiny relative to the number of famine deaths. Maybe the same is also true of deliberate starvation.

Davies & Wheatcroft argue that the Soviet 1931–34 famine was not a unique event necessitating a unique explanation. Famines were common in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in large parts of the world and are normally explained by 'unintentional' causes.⁶³ However, there is one special factor in the Soviet 1931–34 famine which has to be taken into account when explaining it. It took place in a country where, and at a time when, the government was waging war against the peasantry.⁶⁴ It used enormous deportations, large-scale incarceration in prisons and the Gulag, and mass shootings as weapons in that war, and declined to obtain foreign humanitarian assistance.

The excess deaths in 1930–34 resulted from the interaction of three groups of causes. First, exogenous non-policy-related factors. Examples include the drought of 1931 and, in the interpretation of Davies & Wheatcroft, the weather in 1932. Second, policies aimed at other goals which had excess deaths as an unintended consequence. Examples include the tribute model of rapid industrialisation, the rapid and complete socialisation of livestock, and the emphasis on sown area at the expense of crop rotation. Third, policies aimed at killing people. Examples are the shootings policy of 1930–31 and the starvation policy of 1932–33.⁶⁵ In principle, it would be possible to make estimates of the relative importance of these causes using a model of the factors determining agricultural output and mortality in this period. Such work has not yet begun and is a challenge for the future. It would require both detailed historical knowledge of the situation in 1930–34 and skill in modelling. The statistics unearthed and presented by Davies & Wheatcroft have provided many of the data necessary for such a research project.

Conclusion

As far as *leadership perceptions* are concerned, it is important—especially for non-specialists unfamiliar with Bolshevik thinking—to realise that the party leaders (unlike Tsar Alexander III in 1891 or NGOs and the general Western public today) did not

perceive the famine as a humanitarian catastrophe requiring a major effort to relieve distress and hence made only limited relief efforts. As Leninists they looked at it from the standpoint of the historical process and of the class struggle. They regarded it as a necessary cost of the progressive policies of industrialisation and the building of socialism under conditions of fierce class warfare. Not only was it just one aspect of a necessary policy of extracting resources from agriculture for industrialisation, but it also eliminated class enemies more efficiently than deportation, improved the grain balance by reducing rural overpopulation, and was a disciplinary measure which made a useful contribution to socialising the rural population into their new role as collective farmers.

As far as *intent* is concerned, there is some evidence that in 1930–33 in addition to deportation, sending to prisons and the Gulag, and shooting, Stalin also used starvation in his war against the peasants. In other words, there is some evidence that an unknown fraction of the mortality in the 1931–34 Soviet famine resulted from a conscious policy of starvation. This evidence consists partially of a propaganda-technique and psychological interpretation of a part of the Stalin–Sholokhov correspondence. There is also some supporting circumstantial evidence, particularly concerning the (successful) use of starvation to punish/discipline/(re)educate/socialise the peasants and break their strike, the substitutability of starvation and deportation, and Stalin's declared intention just before the peak of the famine to deal a 'knockout blow' to his peasant enemies.⁶⁶ The role of intent was also supported by the late V.P. Danilov, the leading Russian participant in the archival revolution with respect to the peasants in the 1930s.

The causes of the excess deaths in 1930–34 can be divided into three groups. First, deaths caused by exogenous non-policy-related factors. Examples include the 1931 drought and, in the interpretation of Davies & Wheatcroft, adverse weather in 1932. Second, deaths which were an unintended result of policies with other objectives. Examples of such policies are the tribute model of rapid industrialisation, the rapid and complete socialisation of livestock, and the emphasis on sown area at the expense of crop rotation. Third, deaths which were intended. Examples include the shootings policy of 1930–31 and the starvation policy of 1932–33. Quantitative estimation of the relative importance of these causes has not yet begun and is a fruitful area for future research.

University of Amsterdam

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1 V. Vodovozov, 'Moe znakomstvo s Leninym', *Na chuzoi storone*, vol. XII (Prague, 1925), pp. 176–177. Vodovozov knew Lenin personally in 1891–92, but was writing more than 30 years after the event in an émigré journal. A heavily edited version of Vodovozov's account of Lenin's attitude to the famine and the anti-famine NGO was included in the booklet published by the Marx–Engels–Lenin Institute, *Lenin v Samare 1889–1893* (Moscow, 1933), pp. 98–101. The editor argued (pp. 98–99) that Vodovozov's account had 'a particularly tendentious character' and was quite misleading. According to the editor, Lenin did not oppose *bourgeois-liberal elements* feeding the hungry, organising public works etc., but did oppose seeing these activities as suitable for political exiles and revolutionary youth, as a contribution to the revolution and the overthrow of the

autocracy. Lenin, according to the editor, saw these activities as a distraction from the revolution and advantageous for the ruling class since they lessened peasant dissatisfaction and despair. However, even this publication agrees that Lenin thought that feeding the starving was not appropriate for him and his comrades and was politically harmful. According to Belyakov, who did not know Lenin personally and was writing in a Soviet book in the Khrushchev era, it was not the *famine* which Lenin regarded as progressive but the *consequences* of the famine. ‘Vladimir Il’ich had the bravery to declare that the consequences of the famine [of 1891–92]—the growth of an

industrial proletariat, this gravedigger of the bourgeois system—were progressive, because they facilitated Russian industry and brought us to our final goal, to socialism via capitalism. . . . The famine, in destroying the peasant economy, simultaneously destroys faith not only in the Tsar but also in God and in time without doubt pushes the peasants on the path of revolution and makes the victory of the revolution easier’. (A. Belyakov, *Yunost’ vozhdya* (Moscow, 1960), pp. 78–79). The relevance of Lenin’s position in 1891 in understanding the position of the Soviet leadership in 1932–33 was long ago argued by Conquest; see R. Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow* (London, 1986), p. 234.

- 2 Quoted from V. Kondrashin & D. Penner, *Golod: 1932–1933 gody v sovetskoj derevne (na materialakh Povolzh’ya, Dona i Kubani)* (Samara-Penza, 2002), p. 210.

- 3 R.W. Davies & S. Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger: Soviet Agriculture, 1931–1933* (Basingstoke, 2004), passim. However (p. 441), Davies & Wheatcroft ‘do not at all absolve Stalin from responsibility for the famine. His policies towards the peasants were ruthless and brutal’.

- 4 Actually, the structural decision was not rapid industrialisation as such but rapid industrialisation by means of levying a tribute on the peasantry, i.e. the tribute/coercive/dictatorial model of industrialisation; see M. Ellman, *Socialist Planning* 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 96–110; P.

Graeber was opposed by the Bureau of Stalin’s Comrades, 2004, chapter 2. At the time the tribute was economically unnecessary; see H. Hunter & J. Szyrmer, *Faulty Foundations. Soviet Economic Policies, 1928–1940* (Princeton, 1992), chapter 6; R.C. Allen, *Farm to Factory* (Princeton, 2003), pp. 165–171. This remains controversial. However, for many Bolsheviks it was *politically* necessary. It seems likely that a majority of the party would have endorsed Trotsky’s criticism of Bukharinist policies. These policies, he wrote in 1929, might well yield fruits, but they would be ‘capitalist fruits which at no distant stage will lead to the political downfall of Soviet power’ (*Byulleten’ Oppozitsii*, 1929, 1–2, p. 22). Other models of rapid industrialisation would have had different consequences. For example, in the early 1980s China launched rapid industrialisation based on strategic integration in the world economy (the ‘open door’ model). This model of rapid industrialisation produced some results similar to, but other results very different from, the tribute model. It was the tribute model of rapid industrialisation, not rapid industrialisation as such, which contributed to the 1931–34 famine. Some other model of rapid industrialisation might not have done so.

- 5 The conventional view is that deviations from the trend in grain yields in this period were basically determined by the weather and the availability of traction power (mainly horses); see for example Hunter & Szyrmer, *Faulty Foundations. . .*, chapter 6. However, the cause(s) of the poor 1932 harvest is/are controversial. Tauger argued that the main cause was plant diseases such as wheat rust (M. Tauger, *Natural Disaster and Human Actions in the Soviet Famine of 1931–1933* (Carl Beck Papers no.1506, Pittsburg, 2001)). This seems implausible for the reasons given by Davies & Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger. . .*, footnote 137, pp. 131–132. Davies & Wheatcroft (pp. 119, 128 and 439) argue that the weather was adverse, with low temperatures during the sowing period, high temperatures in the initial flowering stage, and great humidity during early flowering. D. Penner, ‘Stalin and the *Ital’ianka* of 1932–1933 in the Don Region’, *Cahiers du monde russe*, 39, 1–2, 1998, rejects poor weather as a cause of the bad harvest. She argues that there were four direct causes, a reduction in sown acreage, inadequate seed per hectare of planted land, lengthy spring sowing and the unusual number of weeds. She argues that these direct causes were a result of three shortages (of well motivated and experienced farmers, of traction power and of grain). These shortages in turn were the result of the policies of the party and the peasantry’s responses to them. Penner also stresses the large harvest losses resulting from peasant attitudes. Penner’s argument overlaps with that of Davies & Wheatcroft—both draw attention to the structural role of party policy, the shortage of traction power resulting from the decline in horse numbers, and the abundance of weeds. However, Penner rejects poor weather as a factor in 1932, at any rate in the North Caucasus. In her 2002 book (with Kondrashin) she extends this rejection to the Volga region. Penner relies heavily on two well-informed contemporary sources, the January 1933 report of a committee of the presidium of the all-Union TsIK, and the August 1932 report of the British-Canadian agricultural specialist Cairns, neither of which considered the weather as the cause of the

- bad harvest. Nevertheless, the statement by Penner & Kondrashin, *Golod.*, p. 424, that the 1932–33 famine ‘was not connected with weather conditions’ is too strong. Whatever caused the bad 1932 harvest, this statement ignores the effect of the 1931 drought on the 1932 harvest. Peacetime famines usually require two successive bad harvests.
- 6 A proposal that the regions affected by acute food shortages should be opened up to famine relief operations by international charities was made by the Ukrainian President Petrovsky in February 1932—about a year before the peak of the famine. Had it been accepted, it might have saved a considerable number of lives. However, it seems to have got no further than Kosior, the Ukrainian party leader. It was not passed on to the leadership in Moscow. Probably Kosior thought that, given the political mood in the central party leadership, it had no chance of being accepted. However, in March 1932 Kosior did obtain for Ukraine a seed loan (mainly from the centre but also from better-off regions) of 110,000 tons; see Davies & Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger...*, pp. 113–114.
- 7 N. Pianciola, ‘Famine in the Steppe’, *Cahiers du monde russe*, 45, 1–2, 2004.
- 8 O.V. Khlevnyuk, *1937-i: Stalin, NKVD i sovetskoe obshchestvo* (Moscow, 1992), p. 46. The same thought had earlier been expressed by Conquest. Discussing Stalin’s possible role in the deaths of Kuibyshev and Gorky, Conquest wrote that ‘Nor does it seem very probable that more [evidence] will be forthcoming even when the Soviet archives are opened up. For it is rather unlikely that plans for this style of killing are committed to paper’ (R. Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (London, 1990), p. 389).
- 9 See Stalin’s letter to Sholokhov of 6 May 1933, *Voprosy istorii*, 1994, 3, p. 22. The Stalin–Sholokhov correspondence is discussed by Davies & Wheatcroft, but their main emphasis is on Khrushchev’s falsification of the whole story and the positive steps (grain deliveries, an inquiry) that Stalin took to resolve it. Sholokhov’s account of the situation in Ukraine seems to be true. There were numerous collective refusals by collective farmers to work for the collective farms in 1932; see Kondrashin & Penner, *Golod.*, chapter 3.
- 10 Kondrashin & Penner, *Golod.*, pp. 214–215.
- 11 R. Mucchielli, *Psychologie de la publicité et de la propagande* (Paris, 1970), pp. 79–80.
- 12 A.D. Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story* (New York, 1999), pp. 66, 70, 80, 171, 227, 256 and 649.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 66. The propagandist cited was familiar with Mucchielli’s book. The propagandist’s first proposal was to ‘create’ events to lend credence to propaganda. This of course was one of the purposes of the Stalinist show trials, which ‘created’ large-scale wrecking, sabotage and spying, which could then be used to explain economic difficulties and justify the harsh repressive measures of the state. They seem to have been quite effective in achieving these aims. For example, at the time of the Promparty trial, Gorky took the accusations and confessions at face value and wrote that ‘they [i.e. the accused in the Promparty trial] artificially created a famine in the USSR (*Strana sovetov*)’ (M. Gorky, ‘K rabochim i krest’yanam’, *Pravda*, 25 November 1930). He repeated this accusation in M. Gorky, ‘Gumanistam’, *Pravda*, 11 December 1930.
- 14 R.F. Baumeister, *EVIL. Inside Human Cruelty and Violence* (New York, 1997), pp. 43–45.
- 15 This was pointed out to me by Karel C. Berkhoff. Prior to this I too belonged to the ‘unintentional’ school.
- 16 *Voprosy istorii* 1995, 3, p. 5.
- 17 For example, it seems that the British government was involved in the assassination of Darlan in 1942; see D. Reynolds, *In Command of History* (London, 2004), p. 330.
- 18 C. Andrew & V. Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive* (London, 1999); P. Sudoplatov, *Razvedka i kreml’* (Moscow, 1996); I. Starinov, *Superdiversant Stalina* (Moscow, 2004); E.P. Sharapov, *Naum Eitingon—karayushchii mech Stalina* (St Petersburg, 2004); Yu.N. Paporov, *Akademik nelegal’nykh nauk* (St Petersburg, 2004).
- 19 This decree seems to have been first published in *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 1992, 1, pp. 125–128. It was reprinted in V.N. Khaustov, V.P. Naumov & N.S. Plotnikova (compilers), *Lubyanka. Stalin i glavnoe upravlenie gosbezopasnosti NKVD 1937–1938* (Moscow, 2004), pp. 607–611. The latter publication includes a number of related documents not previously published.
- 20 Commenting on the August 1931 decisions to improve conditions for the deportees, Davies & Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger...*, p. 45, rightly note that they ‘followed the pattern familiar from Stalin’s “Dizzy with success” article of March 2, 1930. Economic agencies, local authorities and to some extent the OGPU itself were blamed for the inhumane consequences of the Politburo’s own decisions’.
- 21 Actually the use of torture did not begin in 1937. It began earlier. For example, torture was used in the grain procurement campaign in the winter of 1932–33, as is known from Sholokhov’s letter about it to Stalin of 4 April 1933 (*Voprosy istorii*, 1994, 3, pp. 7–18).

- 22 This well-known document was quoted in the 1956 Pos pelov report (A. Artizov, Yu. Sigachev, I. Shevchuk & V. Khlopov, *Reabilitatsiya: kak eto bylo*, vol. 1, p. 347) and subsequently in Khrushchev's speech 'O kul'te lichnosti i ego posledstviyakh', at the closed session of the 20th Congress (*Izvestiya TsK KPSS*, 1989, 3, p. 145). It has been printed in full several times, e.g. in *Iz istorii zemli tomskoi. God 1937...* (Tomsk, 1998), pp. 309–310, and *1936–1937 gg. Konvener NKVD* (Tomsk and Moscow, 2004), pp. 343–344. Stalin was, of course, quite right about the use of torture by bourgeois intelligence services, as recent events in the 'war on terror' have highlighted.
- 23 These figures come from the Pavlov report (see A. L. Kholm'in & N. V. Petrov, *GLUC: Glavnoe upravlenie tuzem. 1918–1966* (Moscow, 2000), p. 435). The figure given in this source for the number of shootings in 1931 is obviously a misprint. The correct figure is given in the version of the Pavlov report printed in Artizov, Sigachev, Shevchuk & Khlopov, *Reabilitatsiya: kak eto bylo*, vol. 1 p. 76. According to an OGPU document published in *Tragediya sovetskoj derevni*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 2000), p. 809, in 1930 OGPU troikas sentenced 18,996 people to death, excluding East Siberia, Kazakhstan and Central Asia. This is the figure cited in Davies & Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger...*, p. 22.
- 24 In his telegram to Stalin of 10 February 1933 Eikhe pointed out that to accept the planned 100,000 deportees prior to the thawing of the rivers would require mobilising huge numbers of horses, which would severely disorganise forestry and agriculture. He also argued that even to accept the reduced number of deportees for West Siberia that he proposed would require massive preparatory efforts, one aspect of which would have to be building additional boats. For the text of the telegram see *1933 g. Nazinskaya tragediya* (Tomsk, 2002), pp. 27–28. It is also printed in V. Danilov & S. Krasil'nikov (eds), *Spetspereselentsy v Zapadnoi Sibiri 1933–1938* (Novosibirsk, 1994), p. 78. The latter also includes the related decision of the *byuro* of the *kraikom* of 9 February 1933.
- 25 *February 1933: Factory*, chapter 4.
- 26 The usefulness—to the government—of the famine in bringing consumption and production into line was apparently pointed out by Dr. Otto Schiller, the agricultural attaché of the German Embassy in Moscow, already in 1933; see J. Koshiw, 'The 1932–33 Famine in the British Government Archives', in W. Isajiw, *Famine-Genocide in Ukraine, 1932–1933* (Toronto, 2003), p. 60.
- 27 V. P. Danilov & I. E. Zelenin, 'Organizovannyi golod. K 70-letiyu obschekrest'yanskoi tragedii', *Otechestvennaya istoriya*, 2004, 5.
- 28 The idea that one of the motives of the party leadership was to punish the peasants for their poor work (or as the party leadership perceived it, sabotage) is also argued in Kondrashin & Penner, *Golod...*, pp. 209–210, 377–378.
- 29 The importance of policy is not in dispute. Davies & Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger...*, p. 434, write that 'The fundamental cause of the deterioration in agriculture in 1928–33 was the unremitting state pressure on rural resources'. What is in dispute is the role of exogenous factors (two bad harvests) and of intent. Danilov & Zelenin differ from Davies & Wheatcroft on both these issues, and the present writer on just the latter.
- 30 Davies & Wheatcroft are quite right in thinking that two successive bad harvests, under the conditions prevailing in the Russian empire and in the USSR prior to 1948, normally led to famine. Furthermore, their arguments about the size of the 1931 and 1932 harvests are powerful and their estimates for these are the best currently available. However, it is necessary to consider not only why there was a famine but also why the number of victims was so large. Davies & Wheatcroft offer a better explanation of the first than of the second. After all, in 1945 and 1946 the harvest (according to official estimates) was only 47.3 and 39.6 million tons compared with 57–65 million tons and 55–60 million tons (the Davies & Wheatcroft estimates for 1931 and 1932). Nevertheless, the number of excess deaths in 1946–48 was only about 22% of that in 1931–34. In explaining the number of excess deaths in each case, one has to consider not only the size of the harvest but also the policies and intentions of the state. Even without two bad harvests, the policy of socialising the livestock of the Kazakhs without making adequate provision for their care might have generated a famine in Kazakhstan (although it would probably have led to fewer victims had the availability of grain been greater).
- 31 In *The New English Bible, Hebrews*, 12.11 reads 'Discipline, no doubt, is never pleasant; at the time it seems painful, but in the end it yields for those who have been trained by it the peaceful harvest of an honest life'.
- 32 The need to discipline the collective farmers, and readiness to use tough measures to achieve this, were commonplace in the early 1930s. For example, in 1931 during the spring sowing campaign the use of floggings and beatings to raise discipline seems to have been widespread. This revival of the methods of serf-owners was especially used by activists of the 'Unions for the struggle for

- discipline'. However, the local officials responsible seem subsequently to have been punished (Kondrashin & Penner, *Golod.* . ., p. 111).
- 33 There were some reductions. The initial 1932 grain procurement plan for the USSR of 20.56 million tons was reduced to 17.53 million tons by the end of November 1932; see Davies & Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger.* . ., pp. 181–185.
- 34 The party leadership did provide some famine relief; see *Ibid.*, pp. 214–223, 424–426 and table 23.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 440.
- 36 In addition to the economic arguments against this—the acute balance of payments crisis, its probable effect of crowding out machinery imports, and its likely negative effect on the USSR's credit rating—there was also a political objection. It would have undermined the USSR's image in the world. In August 1934 Molotov and Kaganovich suggested to Stalin importing 100,000 tons of grain from the Far East, while simultaneously exporting 100,000 tons of grain to Europe. This would have been a net import of zero, reduced the freight transport burden on the railways, and been financially profitable. Stalin, however, vetoed it on the ground that 'The import of grain now, when abroad they are shouting about the shortage of grain in the USSR, might produce a political minus' (*Stalin i Kaganovich. Perepiska. 1931–1936 gg.* (Moscow, 2001), pp. 461–462). A lot of attention has been given in recent years to how the activities of communists and fellow-travellers in the West (and in cases such as Gorky also in the USSR) supported Stalinist terror. A refusal to import grain out of apprehension about its political exploitation by anti-communists is an example of how the anti-communists (who could be relied on to exploit Soviet grain imports for propaganda purposes) also had a negative effect on the welfare of the Soviet population.
- 37 Davies & Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger.* . ., p. 238.
- 38 Penner, 'Stalin and the *Ital'ianka.* . .', pp. 40–48.
- 39 See Kahaner 2004, p. 66.
- 40 Kosior's report was published in F.M. Rudych (ed.), *Holod 1932–1933 rokiv na Ukraini* (Kyiv, 1990), pp. 441–444; the crucial passages are on p. 443. This report seems not to be mentioned in Davies & Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger.* . .
- 41 Quoted from E.H. Carr, *The New Society* (London, 1960), p. 42. In 1933 in the Volga region there was a peasant rumour to the effect that the government used the famine in the way that some animal trainers used food deprivation. The aim of the latter was to break in the animals and train them to be obedient. The aim of the former was to discipline the peasants and make them obedient collective farmers (Kondrashin & Penner, *Golod.* . ., pp. 214–215). Although not the whole truth, this rumour may well have contained elements of the truth.
- 42 Extracts from the speeches of Stalin and Molotov at this meeting were published in V. Danilov, R. Manning & L. Viola (eds), *Tragediya sovet'skoi derevni*, vol. 3 (Moscow, 2001), pp. 557–561. Stalin's speech is discussed in Davies & Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger.* . ., pp. 187–188. (Davies & Wheatcroft translate *sokrushitel'nyi* as 'crushing' rather than 'knockout'.)
- 43 See for example the OGPU reports of 5 August 1932, 15 September 1932 and 22 September 1932 (*Tragediya sovet'skoi derevni*, vol. 3, pp. 446–452, 472–476, and 488–489).
- 44 S. Krasil'nikov, *Serp i molokh. Krest'yanskaya ssylka v Zapadnoi Sibiri v 1930-e gody* (Moscow, 2003), p. 95; *1933 g. Nazinskaya tragediya*, pp. 8–10. As far as the purpose of the 1933 deportations is concerned, O. Khlevniuk, *The History of the Gulag* (New Haven, 2004), pp. 55–56, has suggested that 'It is possible that the leaders of the country supported the deportation of a large segment of the population in the European part of the USSR as a means both to reduce social tensions and to alleviate the acute food crisis'.
- 45 See *1933 g. Nazinskaya tragediya*, pp. 8–10; Krasil'nikov, *Serp i molokh.* . ., p. 107. The 1933 deportations are not discussed in Davies & Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger.* . .
- 46 Krasil'nikov, *Serp i molokh.* . ., p. 106.
- 47 Khlevnyuk has suggested that the reason for the non-fulfillment of the 1933 deportation targets was the failure to organise efficiently the 'special settlements'; see Khlevniuk, *The History of the Gulag*, p. 63.
- 48 For the text see *Tragediya sovet'skoi derevni*, vol. 3, pp. 746–750.
- 49 Davies & Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger.* . ., p. 441 argue that the famine was 'undesirable' for the Soviet leadership. As a proposition about the *external* situation (the international image of the USSR), this is obviously correct. Also as a proposition about the *internal* situation, it is correct for the towns. The worker unrest and adverse effects on labour productivity were undesirable for the leadership. However, for the rural areas this characterisation ignores the famine's usefulness in eliminating 'class enemies' more efficiently than deportation. It also ignores the contribution to improving the grain balance made by reducing rural overpopulation. It also ignores the famine's contribution to disciplining/punishing/socialising/(re)educating the rural population.

- 50 I. Stalin, *Voprosy Leninizma*, 11th edn (Moscow, 1945), pp. 487–488, originally published in *Pravda*, 6 May 1935 (italics added). The corrected stenogram was published in V.A. Nevezhin (ed.), *Zastol'nye rechi Stalina* (Moscow and St Petersburg, 2003), pp. 84–91. For the uncorrected stenogram of a very similar speech Stalin made the previous day see Nevezhin, *Zastol'nye rechi...*, pp. 76–84.
- 51 E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (London, 1961), p. 75. Carr's remark refers explicitly to 'collectivisation', not the famine, but the 'brutalities and abuses' he refers to may well have included not just 'dekulakisation' but also the subsequent famine. They are often treated as part of the same process. There is also some temporal overlap.
- 52 *Pravda*, 28 September 1918.
- 53 B. Falk, *Sowjetische Städte in der Hungersnot 1932/33* (Cologne, 2005), p. 31.
- 54 *Ibid.*, table 16, p. 331.
- 55 For a study of the leadership's (not very successful) attempts to feed the workers during the famine see *Ibid.*
- 56 S.I. Golotik & V.V. Minaev, *Naseleni i vlast'* (Moscow, 2004), p. 119, quoting two studies by Plotnikov about dekulakisation in the Urals.
- 57 *Sovetskaya derevnya glazami...*, vol. 3, book 1, pp. 774–787.
- 58 *Tragediya sovetskoi derevni*, vol. 3, p. 639. As Davies & Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger...*, p. 191, sensibly noted, 'The desperate struggle of the state to exploit the peasants to the point of death was depicted as a righteous battle against counter-revolution'.
- 59 Rudych (ed.), *Holod 1932–1933...*, p. 443.
- 60 This perception was not confined to the leadership. N.A. Ivnitky, *Sud'ba raskulachennykh v SSSR* (Moscow, 2004), p. 40, quotes a Komsomol member and teacher who witnessed 'kulaks' being packed as freight carriages prior to the famine. 'Kulaks are kulaks, but people—they are people. In other words, the kulaks as inhumane exploiters were not really people at all, even if they—and their wives and children—looked and sounded just like people. Hence they and their families did not deserve the kind of treatment appropriate to people.'
- 61 O.V. Khlevnyuk *et al.* (eds), *Stalin i Kaganovich. Perepiska. 1931–1936 gg.* (Moscow, 2001), pp. 273–275.
- 62 For a well-informed discussion of the relationship between the famine and Soviet policies towards Ukraine see T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire* (Ithaca, 2001), chapter 7; and T. Martin, 'The 1932–33 Ukrainian Terror: New Documentation on Surveillance and the Thought Process of Stalin', in W. Isajiw (ed.), *Famine-Genocide in Ukraine, 1932–1933* (Toronto, 2003). For an overview of the role of the famine and the discussion of it in contemporary Ukraine see G. Kas'yanov, 'Razrytaya mogila: golod 1932–1933 godov v Ukrainskoi istoriografii, politike i massovom soznanii', *Ab imperio*, 2004, 3.
- 63 Davies & Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger...*, pp. 400–401. One famine which was clearly 'intentional' was the 1941–43 famine in occupied Kiev; see K.C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), chapter 7.
- 64 This is partially recognised in the Davies & Wheatcroft calculation of the number of famine victims. They include in the total of almost six million excess deaths from famine in 1930–33 approximately 300,000 (i.e. about 5%) in the OGPU system. These will have been mainly 'kulaks' and their family members who died during deportation or in prisons, 'special settlements' or camps. Naturally, the responsibility of the state for these deaths was greater than for those who died in their own villages or while in flight from them. Davies & Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger...*, also include an informative chapter (chapter 2) on the 1930–31 deportations.
- 65 In practice, the allocation of some of the deaths to one or another of these three groups might be somewhat arbitrary. Take the 'kulaks' and their family members who died en route to 'special settlements', in them, or while trying to escape from them. The policy of which they were victims was the 'liquidation of the kulaks as a class'. This did not require them all to be killed, and their labour while in deportation was wanted, but their death helped the implementation of the policy.

66 In March 1938, at the third of the big Moscow trials, Yagoda was accused of murdering Gorky. Applying the 'accusation in a mirror' logic, one could regard this as evidence that actually Stalin murdered Gorky. However, considering this matter in the light of this and additional evidence, Conquest concluded that the case against Stalin with respect to Gorky's death was non-proven (R. Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (London, 1990), p. 389). This indicates that traditionally the 'accusation in a mirror' type of argument has been regarded as only weak evidence. On its own, it is indeed only weak evidence. This article does not rely on it alone, but

strengthens it with respect to the 1931–34 famine by

- (a) explaining its theoretical basis and contemporary use,
- (b) giving a number of unambiguous examples where it is certainly correct to interpret Stalin's words using the 'accusation in a mirror' logic,
- (c) presenting also several pieces of circumstantial evidence,
- (d) explaining that the attitude of Bolsheviks to famines in general and to that of 1931–34 in particular was quite different from that of the general Western public today,
- (e) pointing out that reliance on the disciplining effect of hunger does not reflect uniquely Bolshevik inhumanity but is inherent in certain types of industrialisation scenarios and was also part of the conventional wisdom of the British ruling class during the British industrial revolution,
- (f) drawing attention to the need to explain both the fact of a famine in 1931–34 and the large number of victims of that famine, and
- (g) qualifying the Davies & Wheatcroft argument that for the Soviet leadership the famine was 'undesirable' by pointing out that *internally*, in *rural areas*, it had a number of benefits for the

Soviet leadership.

The present author considers that these considerations taken together do indeed provide reasonable evidence that a starvation policy was one of the conjunctural factors contributing to the famine of 1931–34. In addition to the evidence presented in this article, there is also the argument from authority (the late V.P. Danilov).