

Covert Polish Missions Across  
the Soviet Ukrainian Border, 1928-1933

*di Timothy Snyder*

The flaws of the European border arrangements after the First World War are well-remembered, as is their revision before and during the Second World War. All but forgotten, however, is a grand interwar initiative to revise the borders of eastern Europe by destroying the Soviet Union. The Promethean Movement of the 1920s and 1930s was an anti-communist international, designed to hasten the disintegration of the Soviet Union and to create independent States from its republics. While Moscow tried to use communist parties in European countries to protect its own interests, Prometheans tried to use national questions within the Soviet Union to undermine communism. The name of the movement was ambiguous: to some suggesting the ancient culture of the oppressed nations themselves, to others the idea of bringing fire from outside to the darkness of the Soviet Union. It brought together the grand strategists of Warsaw and exiled patriots from the former Russian Empire whose attempts to found independent States had been thwarted by the Bolsheviks in the years after the October Revolution of 1917.

The political parties who represented oppressed nations depended, in exile, upon States that wished to undermine Soviet rule<sup>1</sup>. Prometheanism was supported by western powers hostile to the Soviet Union, morally by Britain and France, politically and financially by Poland<sup>2</sup>. Prometheanism was never an official policy of any Polish government, and had no support from Polish political parties, who were never consulted. In the first half of the 1920s, the Promethean project was largely a matter of preserving per-

<sup>1</sup> There is little secondary literature on Prometheanism. Western studies exaggerate the role of France and Britain. A valuable exception is E. Copeaux, *Le mouvement "Prométhéen"*, in «Cahiers d'études sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien», n. 16, 1993, pp. 1-36.

<sup>2</sup> Polish funding: E. Charaszkiewicz, *Strona finansowa problemu prometejskiego*, Paris, 1 December 1939, in Józef Piłsudski Institute, New York (JPI) TO 38/1/37-48; J. Nakaszydze, *Professor Dr. Roman Smal-Stocki (1893-1969)*, in «Zeszyte Historyczne», n. 17, 1970, p. 194.

sonal connections. Józef Piłsudski, Polish head-of-state and commander-in-chief during the Polish-Bolshevik War of 1919-1920, was in political retirement between 1923 and 1926. He hosted exiled leaders of the non-Russian nations (Crimean Tatars, Georgians, and Ukrainians) in his private home, and put them in touch with his trusted colleagues<sup>3</sup>. In May 1926, Piłsudski returned to power in a coup d'état. He entrusted the project to agents in several ministries: foreign affairs, defense, internal affairs and religion. It was also given covert funding. The budget for the Promethean project, distributed among these ministries, was 900.000 zlotys for 1927, peaked at 1.145.000 zlotys in 1932, and was 900.000 zlotys in 1939<sup>4</sup>. The Polish Prometheans met regularly in clandestine inter-ministerial sessions<sup>5</sup>.

The head of Promethean operations was Tadeusz Hołowko. Hołowko's formal position was director of the Eastern Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After Piłsudski's coup, exiled politicians sent appeals to the Polish government, and Piłsudski sent Hołowko to them. Hołowko helped to organize the representatives of the non-Russian secessionist movements in emigration in Paris, and sponsored their French-language publication «Prométhée»<sup>6</sup>. With the help of his own trusted men within the Polish diplomatic corps, Hołowko also attended closely to Ankara and Teheran, where permanent Promethean outposts were established. In the near east, Hołowko's wished to enlist Turkish support for a pan-Turkic rebellion in the southern Soviet Union, and Iranian support for a Caucasian federation that would remove Azerbaijan, Georgia, and the Caucasian mountain regions (such as Chechnya) from the Soviet Union<sup>7</sup>. The director of the Polish intelligence agency, the Second Department of the General Staff, ordered studies of the history and demography of the Caucasus<sup>8</sup>. Warsaw sponsored

<sup>3</sup> On Piłsudski's "retirement" see J. Rothschild, *Piłsudski's Coup d'Etat*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1966, p. 74-75.

<sup>4</sup> E. Charaszkiwicz, *Strona finansowa problemu prometejskiego*, Paris, 1 December 1939, JPI TO 38/1/46.

<sup>5</sup> E. Charaszkiwicz, *Zagadnienie Prometejskie*, Paris, 12 February 1940, JPI TO 38/1/31.

<sup>6</sup> An appeal: Président de la Délégation d'Azerbaïdjan, Président p.i. de la Délégation du Caucase du Nord, Envoyé Extraordinaire et Ministre Plénipotentiaire de Géorgie, Président du Conseil des Ministres d'Ukraine, to August Zaleski, Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paris, 9 July 1926, Archiwum Akt Nowych, Warsaw, (AAN) MSZ 6687/9.

<sup>7</sup> Centers of Promethean activity: AAN MSZ 6688. Ankara, Constantinople, and Teheran: AAN MSZ 6687/22-28; AAN MSZ 6690/32-42. Turkestan: AAN MSZ 6689/120-123; AAN MSZ 6690/1; also files in Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe, Rembertów, Poland (CAW) I/303/4/5460. Permanent outposts: E. Charaszkiwicz, *Zagadnienie Prometejskie*, Paris, 12 February 1940, JPI TO 38/1/24.

<sup>8</sup> *Zarys historyczno-etnograficzny północnego kaukazu*, 15 April 1930, JPI UMW 7/5/542-594. See related files JPI UMW 7/5.

the would-be Caucasian Confederation, and paid especial attention to the possibility of an independent Georgia<sup>9</sup>. The Polish consulate in Tblisi, Soviet Georgia, was famously active, despite the absence of a Polish population to justify traditional consular work. When some of Hołowko's Georgian contacts were tried in the Soviet Ukrainian capital of Kharkiv in 1927, his role became widely known<sup>10</sup>.

### *Promethean Ukraine*

Ukraine was indeed the center of Polish hopes, and Promethean policies concentrated Polish financial, political, and military resources at the Polish-Ukrainian border. Under Piłsudski's first period of rule, Warsaw had allied with the briefly-independent Ukrainian People's Republic. Allies Polish and Ukrainian armies had marched on Kyiv in May 1920. They were driven back by the Bolsheviks, and by the terms of the peace agreement of March 1921 Ukrainian soldiers in Poland were to be interned. Many thousands of them emigrated further. Their leader, Symon Petliura, was assassinated in Paris days after Piłsudski returned to power in May 1926. Piłsudski nevertheless pushed forward with secret military cooperation with remaining Ukrainian forces.

After Piłsudski's coup, about thirty-five Ukrainians were brought into the Polish Army as contract officers<sup>11</sup>. In the greatest of secrecy, the army of the Ukrainian People's Republic was re-established on Polish soil on 28 February 1927. The Ukrainian general staff's primary goals were the rapid creation of a trained military force, and the creation of conditions in Soviet Ukraine favorable to outside intervention<sup>12</sup>. The general staff was divided into three Sections. The First Section was responsible for war planning. It recruited and listed real and potential Ukrainian officers and soldiers, and redrew mobilization plans for another war against the Soviet Union. War planning included schemes for the occupation of Soviet Ukraine<sup>13</sup>. The

<sup>9</sup> Caucasia: AAN MSZ 6690/47-49; AAN MSZ 6690/205; AAN MSZ 6690/206.

<sup>10</sup> Litvinov protests: *Dokumenty i materiały do historii stosunków polsko-radzieckich*, Warsaw, Książka i Wiedza, Vol. 5, 1966, p. 432.

<sup>11</sup> Gen. Bryg. Jacynik, Dowódca O[kręgu] K[orpusu] I, *Oficerowie ukraińscy przydzieleni do armji polskiej*, Warsaw, 28 August 1928, in CAW I/371/1/A.32.

<sup>12</sup> A. Livyts'kyi and V. Sal's'kyi, *Nakaz bolovnoi komandy viiska i floty Ukrain's'koï Narodn'oi Respubliky*, 28 February 1927, JPI UMW 7/4/1/6-8; related "Protokol" of 10 March 1927 at CAW I/380/2/27/466 and JPI UMW 7/4/1/13-19.

<sup>13</sup> War and occupation planning: "Ts[ilkom] Taiemno. Na chas viiny," Pavlo Shandruk, "Variiant B. Doklad", 15 February 1929; "Pro Etapni Raiony"; "Dyviziia"; all in CAW I/380/2/25; also similar records in JPI UMW 7/4/1/39-64.

Second Section was responsible for intelligence and counter-intelligence. Its main task was the creation of clandestine cells in Soviet Ukraine from Kyiv westward, reliable people to be exploited in case of war. It was also expected to create its own capacity to run Ukrainian agents from Poland to Soviet Ukraine<sup>14</sup>. The Third Section was responsible for the production of propaganda that to be distributed on the Soviet side of the border<sup>15</sup>.

The general outline of the new Polish policy must have been clear to the Soviets. Piłsudski sent a trusted colleague, Henryk Józewski, to govern Volhynia, a Polish province with a long border with Soviet Ukraine<sup>16</sup>. Józewski had been in charge of the Ukrainian section of a Polish paramilitary organization during the Polish-Bolshevik War, and then had served as a vice-minister of internal affairs in the Ukrainian government briefly re-established in Kyiv in 1920. As Volhynian governor, Józewski spoke of the March on Kyiv, the Piłsudski-Petliura alliance, and the future Ukrainian State to be created from Soviet Ukraine. He thought that “the Piłsudski-Petliura conception is the most powerful construction, with the widest horizons and the brightest prospects, the only construction that will allow the Polish-Ukrainian question to be resolved along the lines of *raison d'état*”<sup>17</sup>. His own decisions were made in the spirit of “the Polish-Ukrainian legend of Petliura, in consultation with the ataman’s men in Volhynia”<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, he added, “the legend of Petliura was attached to my person, the legend of the Polish-Ukrainian alliance for the independence of Ukraine”. As Józewski let no one forget, his friendships with these men were forged in the “the brotherhood of armed struggle against Moscow”<sup>19</sup>. While some of Józewski’s Petliurite colleagues installed themselves in Volhynia, another ran a Polish intelligence outpost in Soviet Ukraine, and dozens more ran espionage mis-

<sup>14</sup> [Pavlo Shandruk], *Protokol konferentsii 10 bereznia 1927 roku v prysutnosti Pana Holovnoho Otomana Viis'ka i fl'ty UNR Andriia Livyts'koho*, JPI UMW 7/4/1/15.

<sup>15</sup> [Third Section, URL Army], *Przedmiot i środki pracy III-j sekcji i organizacja jej*, [1927], JPI UMW 7/4/1/36-37.

<sup>16</sup> On Józewski see T. Snyder, *Sketches from a Secret War: A Polish Artist's Mission to Liberate Soviet Ukraine*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2005; J. Kęsik, *Zaufany Komendanta: Biografia Polityczna Jana Henryka Józewskiego 1892-1981*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław, 1995; W. Mędrzecki, *Województwo wołyńskie*, Ossolineum, Wrocław, 1988; C. Schenke, *Nationalstaat und nationale Frage: Polen und die Ukrainer 1921-1939*, Dölling und Galitz Verlag, Hamburg, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> *Protokół konferencji Wojewodów z Kresów Wschodnich*, Łuck, 2-3 December 1929, AAN MSZ 5314/38-39.

<sup>18</sup> H. Józewski, *Zamiast pamiętnika* (2), in «Zeszyty Historyczne», n. 60, 1982, p. 74.

<sup>19</sup> Quotations from H. Józewski, “Opowieść o istnieniu” “Myśli o władzy”, vol. 4, part V, p. 91, Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Dział Rękopisów, Warsaw (BUWDR) 3189/2. See also “Wołyf -- Sprawozdanie,” June 1937, 51, BUWDR 1549; A. Chojnowski, *Koncepcje polityki narodowościowej rządów polskich w latach 1921-1939*, Ossolineum, Wrocław, 1979, p. 157.

sions on the Soviet side of the border. Józewski also hosted British consular and military officers at his home<sup>20</sup>.

A few weeks after he arrived in Volhynia, on 2 September 1928, Józewski presented his aims in an exposé. He identified himself as a member of the Ukrainian People's Republic government of 1920, called the Piłsudski-Petliura alliance the template for his policy as provincial governor, and entertained the possibility of Ukrainian independence in Soviet Ukraine. The Soviet press criticised and mocked Józewski's past and policy unremittingly for the next month. An essay in *Pravda* of 14 September claimed that what was on Józewski's tongue was on Piłsudski's mind, and that the exposé was one more reason to expect war from Poland<sup>21</sup>. The following day «Izvestiia» published an accurate biography of Józewski, and claimed that Ukrainian political immigrants would be used in Volhynia as shock troops for interventions in the Soviet Union and as ministers in a Ukrainian shadow State<sup>22</sup>. Józewski's goal, Soviet newspapers maintained, was to separate Ukraine from the Soviet Union. The point on 15 September 1928 by the editorial cartoon dominating «Izvestiia»'s front page: Józewski as jack-in-the-box springs out, wearing a Polish officer's cap over a Ukrainian helmet, bristling with mad rage and unshaven cheeks, proclaiming through a thick if imaginary mustache that "Ukraine must belong to Poland".

"There exists", said Józewski in his September 1928 address, "an underground current, a deep current, which unites in itself the tendencies of development of both nations – Polish and Ukrainian. There exists a subconscious community, unailing in its line of development"<sup>23</sup>. Soviet leaders might have noted that the currents in question flowed at other levels than the subconscious. That summer, Soviet border guards noticed bottles with corks in the top and a single pebble in the bottom, bobbing their jolly way into Soviet Ukraine, drawn by the currents of rivers. Each contained five or six posters or pamphlets, with titles such as: "Peasants, Don't Give Your Grain to the Bolsheviks"; "Moscow's Prison of Nations"; and "Father Taras Shevchenko summons you, peasants and laborers, to battle for an independent Ukraine". This last poster proclaimed the Ukrainian national revolution. The director of Soviet security organs at the border sent an alarmed

<sup>20</sup> The British in Łuck: Ppłk Leszkowicz, *Do dyr. dep. 1-ego Ministerstwa Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego*, 27 October 1953, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Warsaw (IPN) 0330/249/t-1/122; ZP(2), 135.

<sup>21</sup> D. Zaslavskii, *Get'man Zagłoba-Iuzefs'kii*, in «Pravda», 14 September 1928, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> *Otkliki pol'skoi pečati na vystuplenie volynskogo voevody*, in «Izvestiia», 15 September 1928.

<sup>23</sup> [Henryk Józewski], *Przemówienie Wojewody Józewskiego na Zjeździe Posłów i Senatorów B.B. z Wołynia*, «Przegląd Wołyński», 26 August 1928, p. 2.

telegram to Moscow on 31 August 1928. This “significant transport of counter-revolutionary proclamations”, he correctly presumed, was the work of Petliurite agents resident in Poland<sup>24</sup>. Józewski’s exposé, which came two days after the telegram, was part of an opening salvo in a propaganda war, a signal of a change of course, a direct challenge to the Soviet system.

### *The Border Crossers*

The Counter-Intelligence Bureau of Poland’s Second Department ran border-crossing operations through information sections in each of the ten army field commands in Poland. While the Warsaw field command’s information section was responsible for the recruitment and training of counter-intelligence agents, the eastern field commands, responsible for coordinating and executing missions on Soviet territory. Most Ukrainian missions were run through the field command at Lwów. The agents sent by the information section of the Lwów field command crossed the border illegally, with discrete intelligence, counter-intelligence, propaganda, or sabotage missions to complete. Whereas officers working for the outposts enjoyed diplomatic immunity, the border crossers were performing an action that was illegal from start to finish. Some initial missions were crowned with success. In spring 1929, Ukrainian counter-intelligence officers in Polish employ were proposing to exploit ukrainization by penetrating Soviet institutions<sup>25</sup>. In spring 1930, Agent 1309 sent back the requested material, agent 1316 had recruited a Soviet functionary in Dnipropetrovsk. Agent 1353 had been in and out of the Russian republic of the Soviet Union twice, and returned with a prospective Soviet agent. In 1930, a promising wave of new Ukrainian recruits filled the ranks as Ukrainians fled collectivization in the Soviet Union, and a female agent was carrying out an “inspiration” in the Kyiv GPU<sup>26</sup>.

By 1932, the work of the Lwów command brought measurable results. In March the command could boast 61 active agents, and missions in the GPU in Proskuriv, Iampol, Shepetivka, and Kam’ianets’ Podil’skyi, on the

<sup>24</sup> The contents of the 1928 broadsides and booklets: *Tretia seksia Heneralnobo Shtabu UNR...*, 7 April 1931, CAW I/380/2/26/83-88. Soviet reaction and quotation: Telegram from Katsnelson, 31 August 1928, in *Pogranichnye voiska SSSR 1918-1929: Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, Nauka, Moscow, 1973, pp. 540-542.

<sup>25</sup> *Pratsia 2-i Sektsii na Ukraïni /Persha referentura/*, [May 1929], CAW I/303/4/1978.

<sup>26</sup> Mjr. dypl. Szeligowski, Ekspozytura V Oddziału II Sztabu Głównego, *Raport org. za m. marzec 1930 r.*, Lwów, 12 April 1930, CAW I/303/4/6982; Mjr. dypl. Szeligowski, Ekspozytura V Oddziału II Sztabu Głównego, *Raport org. za m. kwiecień 1930 r.*, Lwów, 8 May 1930, CAW I/303/4/6982.

Dniester fleet, and in the Kyiv and Kharkiv garrisons of the Red Army<sup>27</sup>. Agents were still captured by Soviet security organs, but a far greater percentage seemed to have remained in the Soviet Union long enough to carry out missions<sup>28</sup>. They learned a great deal about the personnel of the GPU, especially in Ukraine, and especially about its nationality experts<sup>29</sup>. The mechanism of border crossing, the crucial start to the entire operation, had been perfected. The Second Department was now practiced in recruiting agents. The Border Defense Corps, reformed in 1931, was now in part an intelligence organization subordinated to the Second Department. By now, its officers were experienced in finding open “windows” on the Soviet border at short notice. The Second Department officer would collect the prospective agent in Warsaw or Lwów, and take him to a Volhynian town. There the Border Defense Corps would make the final arrangements, choose a “window”, and lead the agent to the border. In Józewski’s Volhynia, the Równe section of the Border Defense Corps had its own intelligence office, and ran its own network of about fourteen agents, sending some as far as Kyiv<sup>30</sup>.

The Lwów command was also responsible for anti-Soviet Russian agents employed by the counter-intelligence section of Second Department in Warsaw. Barnaba Outpost, for example, was at first a British-Polish, and then a Polish, network of anti-Bolshevik Russian agents. British and Polish intelligence services first collected Russians in emigration in western Europe, chiefly it seems in France, and sent them to Poland for training. Barnaba seems also to have employed Belarusian agents<sup>31</sup>. The Warsaw command of the Second Department prepared such agents for missions to the Soviet Union, and then sent them across the border, very often from Volhynia. Vladimir Skrobot was sent to Minsk once and Moscow twice, although he was apparently caught in March 1932. Over the course of 1932 and 1933, Grigor Husan was sent twice to Minsk and twice to Samara. At least eight Barnaba missions involved border crossings in Volhynia, and at least one of these missions ended with the arrest of the

<sup>27</sup> Proskuriv, also known as Ploskuriv, was renamed Khmel’nyts’kyi in 1954.

<sup>28</sup> Kpt. Orłowski, Szef Ekspozytury 5, Second Department, *Raport organizacyjny za miesiąc luty 1932 r.*, Lwów, 9 March 1932, CAW I/303/4/1826; Ekspozytura 5, *Raport organizacyjny za miesiąc marzec 1932 roku*, Lwów, 9 April 1932, CAW I/303/4/7006. See also Mjr. Demel, *Ocena*, 12 January 1932, CAW I/303/4/1826.

<sup>29</sup> A. Pełofski, *Kontrwywiad II Rzeczypospolitej*, Bellona, Warsaw, 2002, pp. 162-163.

<sup>30</sup> Równe outpost: KOP, Placówka Wywiadowcza Równe, *Raport organizacyjny za miesiąc marzec 1932 r.*, 2 April 1932, CAW I/303/4/7006. Some missions: *Do Referatu Wschód II Oddziału Szt. Głównego*, 5 February 1932, CAW I/303/4/1939.

<sup>31</sup> [Placówka Barnaba] W. Wołkowski, *Raport*, 2 October 1933, CAW I/303/4/1943.

agent by the GPU<sup>32</sup>. The liaison between Polish and British intelligence appears to have been Niezbrzycki, who wrote of informal cooperation in 1932 and a formal relationship between the Second Department and the Secret Service the following year<sup>33</sup>.

By 1931, many new Polish agents were Ukrainians, patriots of the generation of 1920, or younger refugees from Soviet Ukraine. Thousands of peasants escaped the collectivization of agriculture in Soviet Ukraine by illegally crossing the border to Poland. Some of these were recruited by the Lwów command, and were noted as “Ukrainian material” or “kulak – reliable”. More Ukrainians took part in a new and distinct network organized by the Second Section of the Ukrainian army, in collaboration with the Second Department. These were sometimes men and women associated with Józewski’s administration in Volhynia, and sent from Józewski’s Volhynia across the Soviet border. In the understanding of the Ukrainian general staff, these agents were to prepare Ukraine for another armed intervention, this one better planned and executed than the Winter March of 1921, timed to exploit the collapse of Soviet nationality policy and the opposition to new Soviet policies that collectivized agricultural land<sup>34</sup>. It took no great powers of observation to see that Ukrainian peasants resisted collectivization on a massive scale. Indeed, Ukrainian peasants themselves told Polish intelligence services what they had experienced.

### *Collectivization*

In 1929 and 1930, the Second Section printed and distributed, with Polish support, tens of thousands of pamphlets and broadsides for distribution in Soviet Ukraine. A 1929 brochure warned of the “Hunger Tsar”. Another pamphlet published that year explained collectivization in terms of “What Muscovite Soviet Power Gives, and What it Takes Away”. A proclamation entitled “Peasants! Don’t Give Your Bread to the Bolsheviks” was printed three times, in 1928, 1929, and 1930<sup>35</sup>. Its interpretation of collec-

<sup>32</sup> Placówka Barnaba, *Wykaz przerzuconych agentów dla Barnaby*, [1933], CAW I/303/4/1943.

<sup>33</sup> [Jerzy Niezbrzycki], *Będąc kierownikiem Referatu Wschodu*, JPI TO 109/1/B.

<sup>34</sup> Border crossings and insurrectionary plans: *Sprawozdanie z 2 Sekcji za czas od 1 grudnia 1931 roku do 1 września 1932 roku*, translation from Ukrainian, [Second Department, Ekspozytura 2, Warsaw], 1932, CAW I/303/4/5560; Livyts’kyi, *D. Ts. U.N.R. v ekzyli*, 27-28. Connections with the Volhynia Experiment: Placówka Barnaba, *Ukrainskaia organizatsiia v Pol’she*, 27 January 1934, CAW I/303/4/1942; IP, Juliusz Wilczur-Garztecki, 8 April 1951, IPN 0192/520/t-1; IP, Henryk Borucki, Warsaw, 26 March 1953, WSR 275/54/t-2.

<sup>35</sup> *Tretia sektiia Heneral’nobo Shtabu UNR...*, 7 April 1931, CAW I/380/2/26/83-88.

tivization: “The specter of hunger again looms above Ukraine! Once again, by the grace of Bolshevik power, our nation will expire by starvation!”. It explained that Moscow would sell Ukrainian foodstuffs for hard currency, which it would use to support communist parties abroad<sup>36</sup>. New broadsides published in 1930 took the same tone. One called upon peasants to abandon the collective farm while they still could, and to take up arms “in the final battle for Land and Freedom”. It explained, farsightedly enough, that food grown on collectives would be taken to the cities and sold abroad<sup>37</sup>. Another explained that starvation would make Ukraine easier for Stalin to rule, and that national independence was the only protection from such policies as collectivization<sup>38</sup>. The propaganda endeavored, in other words, to provide an overarching political interpretation and program that would speak to the experience of individual Ukrainian peasants.

As collectivization in Ukraine accelerated in early 1930, Polish-sponsored agitation spoke to the condition of peasants who faced a sudden and radical change in their way of life. Collectivization meant the rapid seizure of all farmland, and the creation of collective farms for which everyone had to work. Although collectivization officially began in 1928, as of 1 January 1930 only 16 per cent of farmland in Ukraine had been collectivized. By 11 March 1930, this figure reached 64 per cent. Nearly half the farmland was seized in ten weeks. Resistance was immediate and massive. The GPU reported that Ukraine was the most rebellious of the Soviet republics. Nearly one million people in Ukraine were reported as taking part in mass manifestations against collectivization, the vast majority during March 1930. Party agitators were murdered, and party members refused to enter villages. The regions bordering Poland, where propaganda reached best and where flight abroad was possible, were especially rebellious. The GPU reported that hundreds of border villages had simply ceased to exist, their inhabitants having fled<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> Ukraïns'kyi Revoliutsiinyi Komitet [UNR Army, Second Section, Third Referat], *Seliane, ne davaite khliba bolshevikam!*, May 1929, CAW I/380/2/342.

<sup>37</sup> Ukraïns'kyi Revoliutsiinyi Komitet [UNR Army, Second Section, Third Referat], *Do Nezamozhnykiv*, CAW I/380/2/342. *Land and Freedom* was a slogan of the Socialist Revolutionaries in the Russian Empire.

<sup>38</sup> Ukraïns'kyi Revoliutsiinyi Komitet [UNR Army, Second Section, Third Referat], [1930], *Do Ukraïns'kykh Selian*, CAW I/380/2/342.

<sup>39</sup> Pace of collectivization: A. Graziosi, *Collectivisation, révoltes paysannes et politiques gouvernementales a travers les rapports du GPU d'Ukraine de février-mars 1930*, in «Cahiers du Monde russe», n. 3, 1994, p. 543. Figures of resistance (956,587 participants, 4,098 mass manifestations, 2,945 of these in March 1930): V. Danilov, et al. (a cura di), *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni: Kollektivizatsiia i raskulachivanie*, Rosspen, Moscow, 2000, vol. 2, p. 803. Balyts'kyi reports: O. N. Ken, A. I. Rupasov (a cura di), *Politbiuro Ts.K. VKP(b) i otnosbeniia SSSR s zapadnymi sosed-*

Flight often took the form of a church procession: perhaps a spontaneous appropriation of ritual, certainly a collective tactic of escape<sup>40</sup>. On 22 March 1930 the entire village of Sulomna took the banners from the church, and marched solemnly west towards the Polish border. They were stopped by Soviet border guards<sup>41</sup>. The entire village of Pechyvoda decided to walk to Poland on 28 March: two thousand men, women, and children following an elderly lady with a black handkerchief tied to a stick. They might have overwhelmed the border guards by their sheer numbers, but allowed themselves to be distracted by a debate about serfdom instead. Rather than simply fleeing across the border, they called the collective farm manager a lord, and waited for him to be turned over to them<sup>42</sup>. On 2 April the villagers of Nemezhyntsi took two crosses from the church and began the walk west, telling the communists who tried to stop them that they were on their way to a church fair. Members of the local Komsomol, the communist student organization, arrived on horseback and beat them back. Later the regional militia arrived to seize the cattle and horses, and were held back by women who encircled the livestock. When the militia beat the women, their menfolk ran from their houses with their sickles and hoes. The militia returned two weeks later in greater numbers, and this time beat those who resisted to death<sup>43</sup>.

Many thousands of individuals did cross into Poland, where they were apprehended by the Polish border police and required to explain the circumstances of their illegal border crossing before receiving permission to stay. The stories are usually the same, whether the name was Ukrainian, Polish, or Jewish, the signature in Cyrillic or Latin characters, or simply a thumbprint from an officer's inkwell. Everyone reported that all or almost all peasants opposed collectivization<sup>44</sup>. Many of those who fled had feared,

*nimi gosudarstvami*, Evropeiskii Dom, Saint Petersburg, 2001, p. 515. Despite this Christian overtone, pogroms were not associated with anti-collectivization violence in Ukraine.

<sup>40</sup> Anti-Christians and serfdom: A. Graziosi, *Collectivisation*, cit., pp. 464, 453. Serfdom: Protokół wywiadowczy, Benedykt Basiuk, 28 March 1930, CAW I/303/4/6982. Propaganda: Ukraïns'kyi Revoliutsiïnyi Komitet [UNR Army, Second Section, Third Referat], [1930], *Do Ukraïns'kykh Selian*, CAW I/380/2/342. See also L. Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Popular Resistance*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1996, pp. 45-66; S. Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, propaganda, and dissent, 1934-1941*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p. 50.

<sup>41</sup> Sulomna: Kapitan Tomaszewski, Placówka Wywiadowcza 9 Czortków, KOP, *Wiadomości wojskowe*, 3 April 1930, CAW I/303/4/6982.

<sup>42</sup> *Protokół wywiadowczy*, Benedykt Basiuk, 28 March 1930, CAW I/303/4/6982.

<sup>43</sup> *Protokół badania Iwanów Mikołaja*, KOP, 2 April 1930, CAW I/303/4/6982.

<sup>44</sup> *Protokół spisany dnia 23.IV.1930 r. w kanc. komp. 'Husiatyn' w sprawie nielegalnego przekroczenia granicy przez obywatela sow. Jacentiuka*, 23 April 1930; Porucznik Bem, KOP,

with good reason, that they would be sent to Siberia for resisting. Poland's own intelligence officers reported that mass armed uprisings and the murder of communists were the order of the day in the border region. As one concluded, "the population awaits, with great longing, armed intervention from European countries"<sup>45</sup>. The peasants themselves, once they made it across the border, begged the Poles for war. Many peasants are armed and awaiting only a good opportunity, they said: "And if a war broke out, the mood of the people is such, that if the Polish army appeared today they would kiss the soldiers' feet, and the entire population would attack the Bolsheviks"<sup>46</sup>.

The Soviets had some reason to fear border crossers. Józewski's exposé of September 1928 had been unambiguous. The Soviets had broken a Polish diversionary network organized by the Second Department in Soviet Ukraine in 1929<sup>47</sup>. No later than November 1929 the GPU made its first arrest of a Ukrainian agent sent from Poland in the new intelligence and agitation campaign<sup>48</sup>. Although 1930 saw many intelligence successes, ever more Ukrainian agents of Poland were apprehended by the GPU. The Lwów command had to report that during March 1930 agents 1063, 1066, and 1172 were in Soviet prison, that agents 1270 and 1279 had been betrayed on the Soviet side and had to flee, and that agent 1307 was apparently under arrest<sup>49</sup>. By March 1930, then, the GPU would have interrogated several Ukrainians and Poles who had crossed the Soviet border in the new Polish campaign. Some were apparently recruited by the Soviets and dispatched back to Poland with false information<sup>50</sup>. However those interrogations proceeded, the apprehension of the new agents could be understood as a signal of a new policy from the west.

*Protokół badania Bieluka Trofima*, 5 April 1930; *Protokół badania Kupec Fedt*, KOP, 2 April 1930; *Protokół Kubiszyna Dominika*, KOP, 2 April 1930; *Protokół Wywiadowczy*, Heronim Kołodyfski, 27 March 1930, all in CAW I/303/4/6982.

<sup>45</sup> Kapitan Tomaszewski, Placówka Wywiadowcza 9 Czortków, KOP, *Wiadomości wojskowe*, 3 April 1930, CAW I/303/4/6982.

<sup>46</sup> *Protokół spisany dnia 23.IV.1930 r. w kanc. komp. 'Husiatyn' w sprawie nielegalnego przekroczenia granicy przez obywatela sow. Jacentiuka*, 23 April 1930, CAW I/303/4/6982; see also (for example) *Protokół Kubiszyna Dominika*, KOP, 2 April 1930, CAW I/303/4/6982.

<sup>47</sup> Diversions: Włodzimierz Dąbrowski, Ekspozytura 2 Oddz[iał] II, 2 March 1940, report reprinted in «Zeszyty Historyczne», n. 140, 2002, pp. 112-113; E. Charaszkiwicz, *Zagadnienie Prometejskie*, Paris, 12 February 1940, JPI TO 38/1/31.

<sup>48</sup> Ol'chak, *Zvit Ch. 3. 2-i Sektsii za period vid 15 chervnia 1929 roku - 1 chervnia 1930 roku; Dodatok Ch. I*, CAW I/380/2/26/105.

<sup>49</sup> Mjr. dypl. Szeligowski, Ekspozytura V Oddziału II Sztabu Głównego, *Raport org. za m. marzec 1930 r.*, Lwów, 12 April 1930, and also his *Raport org. za m. kwiecień 1930 r.*, Lwów, 8 May 1930, both in CAW I/303/4/6982.

<sup>50</sup> V. V. Doroshenko, et al. (a cura di), *Istoriia sovetskiekh organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti: Uchebnik*, KGB, Moscow, 1977, p. 214.

*Border Anxieties*

As he rose to power in the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet Union, Iosif Stalin exploited fears of an external threat from Poland, and an internal threat from the peasantry. The war scare of spring 1927, when Soviet authorities claimed that Poland would invade, provided an ironic confirmation that these two fears were connected. Many peasants, Soviet intelligence organs reported in 1927, saw the war scare as reliable information and good news, believing that a Polish invasion would allow them to liberate themselves from communism and take revenge on communists. A Belarusian peasant anticipated, presumably with joy, that “after the Poles come we will hang and shoot the communists like dogs”<sup>51</sup>. Ukrainians believed, according to the Soviet State police, that a war with Poland would allow Ukraine to gain its independence<sup>52</sup>. The army of the Ukrainian People’s Republic was indeed secretly revived in early 1927 in Poland. Not surprisingly, its ideal scenario for the liberation of Ukraine from Soviet rule was precisely the combination of domestic rebellion and Polish military intervention<sup>53</sup>.

Stalin linked the Soviet peasantry to Polish militarism in 1928, as he defended his plan to collectivize farmland. Having opposed rapid collectivization in the past, Stalin now changed his position, associating his political career and his own person with the policy, and the policy with the survival of the Soviet State. Whatever the true origins of previous Soviet famines, and by 1928 there had been several, Stalin presented them as the consequences of willful actions by hostile classes. Only the destruction the hostile class of prosperous peasants could remove the internal, and thus weaken the external, threat to the existence of Soviet Union. Stalin took for granted that peasants were hostile to the communist system, and would rebel as soon as they saw the invading Polish armies. In 1928, Stalin presented to his comrades the specter of a war on two fronts: the Polish front, and the peasant front. Since the Soviet Union would lose such a two-front war, he argued, a preventive war was necessary to remove the peasant threat and destroy the capitalist countryside<sup>54</sup>. The peasant question and the Polish question intersected in Soviet Ukraine, where peasants were resisting State requisitions.

<sup>51</sup> V. S. Khristoforov, et al. (a cura di), *“Sovershenno sekretno”: Lubianka-Stalinu o polozhenii v strane (1922-1934 gg.)*, RAN, Moscow, 2003, vol. 5, pp. 426-428, in part. 426.

<sup>52</sup> G. N. Sevostianov, et al. (a cura di), *“Sovershenno sekretno”: Lubianka-Stalinu o polozhenii v strane (1922-1934 gg.)*, RAN, Moscow, 2001, vol. 4, p. 721.

<sup>53</sup> [Pavlo Shandruk], *Protokol konferentsii 10 bereznia 1927 roku v prysutnosti Pana Holovnoho Otomana Viiska i fl'ty UNR Andriia Livyts'koho*, JPI UMW 7/4/1/13.

<sup>54</sup> V. Danilov, et al. (a cura di), *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni: Kollektivizatsiia i raskulachivanie*, Rosspen, Moscow, 1999, vol. 1, pp. 319-321, 326-327.

When Stalin raised these two specters again, he was addressing Russia's ancient dilemma: how to modernize the country to match the West, without exposing the country to aggressive designs from the West. Collectivization was intended both to advance the revolution and to protect it. The State needed the capacity to collect grain predictably, to gain hard currency on foreign markets, and to feed the workers of the Soviet Union's growing cities. The makers of a "scientific" revolution wished to purchase political insurance against the vicissitudes of nature. Collectivization would transfer the costs of poor weather from the State to the peasants. Once the State controlled the farmland and the countryside, it could collect a grain quota regardless of the preferences or needs of those who worked the land. Poor weather would mean famine for peasants, not shortfalls for the State. To be sure, there was also the ideological argument that collective farming would facilitate the construction of socialism, and some Bolsheviks believed that collective farming was more efficient. As peasants in Soviet Ukraine and elsewhere resisted requisitions in 1926, 1927, and 1928, advocates of rapid collectivization in 1929 made a strong case that collectivization was also required for social control<sup>55</sup>. These arguments were used in a power struggle at the heights of the Bolshevik Party, in which Stalin, with the help of allies and temporary coalitions, was slowly gaining a predominant position<sup>56</sup>. However justified, collectivization was bound, in the short run, to intensify rather than resolve the peasant problem. Peasants who were resigned to landlessness might eventually be tamed, but peasants being reduced to landlessness would try to resist.

In spring 1930, as rapid collectivization proceeded, the Soviet leadership faced Stalin's peasant front in southern Russia, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine. Some Soviet leaders believed that they would soon face the Polish front as well<sup>57</sup>. Resistance to collectivization was greatest in Ukraine, and in Ukraine at the Polish border. More than half of the disturbances in Soviet Ukraine took place at the Polish border, where a plausible goal was flight. Soviet border guards had lost control, and rumors spread that Poland was preparing a liberating war<sup>58</sup>. Rumors of a Polish attack were spread by

<sup>55</sup> 1928 problems in Ukraine: A.N. Sakharov, et al. (a cura di), *"Sovershenno sekretno": Lubianka-Stalinu o polozhenii v strane (1922-1934 gg.)*, RAN, Moscow, 2002, vol. 6, pp. 436-437, 450-451, 663.

<sup>56</sup> A cogent account is O. Khlevniouk, *Le cercle du Kremlin: Staline et le Bureau politique dans les années 30: les jeux du pouvoir*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1996.

<sup>57</sup> T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2001, pp. 320-322.

<sup>58</sup> Rumors of war and proportion of demonstrations at border: O. N. Ken, A. I. Rupasov (a cura di), *Politbiuro Ts.K. VKP(b) i otnosheniia SSSR s zapadnymi sosednimi gosudarstvami*, Evropeiskii Dom, Saint Petersburg, 2001, pp. 511-512.

Ukrainian agents of Poland<sup>59</sup>. Local party activists, who for reasons of political self-preservation could not blame collectivization for the flight of peasants, claimed that foreign consulates had organized the exodus<sup>60</sup>. In fact, the Polish consulate in Kharkiv was surprised and overwhelmed by the spontaneous petitions peasants who wished to flee to Poland to escape collectivization<sup>61</sup>. Yet false claims about consulates might have sounded plausible in light of true reports about propaganda.

On 15 March 1930 Stalin called a temporary halt to rapid collectivization. On 17 March 1930 western units of the Red Army were placed at full battle readiness. On 18 March Soviet commissar for military affairs Konstantin Voroshilov March he issued instructions to his officers, in preparation for a Polish attack. By 25 March he had prepared the full projections of the battle theatres. After an attack by the combined forces of Poland and Romania, all of Ukraine and Belarus would be occupied, and Leningrad and western Russia would be at risk<sup>62</sup>. Maxim Litvinov, commissar for foreign affairs, wrote Stalin that he feared that collectivization would provoke a Polish invasion. His instructions from Stalin were to seek peace with Poland. The Soviet foreign ministry undertook a new campaign to bring Poland to the negotiating table. Stalin appeared worried in that Litvinov would miss the chance to sign a treaty with Poland<sup>63</sup>.

### *Warsaw's Choice*

In spring 1930, Poland's Soviet enemy was accusing it of hostile intentions and admitting its own vulnerability; Poland's own intelligence services produced evidence that collectivization had indeed destabilized Soviet

<sup>59</sup> War scare is true: Ukraïns'kyi Revoliutsiïnyi Komitet [UNR Army, Second Section, Third Referat], *Seliane, ne davaite khliba bolshevikam!*, May 1929; Peasants to arms: Ukraïns'kyi Revoliutsiïnyi Komitet [UNR Army, Second Section, Third Referat], *Pro Soiuz Vyzvolennia Ukraïny*: both in CAW I/380/2/342.

<sup>60</sup> Zhytomyr district report of 26 January 1930, in S. Stępien (a cura di), *Polacy na Ukrainie: Zbiór dokumentów 1917-1939*, Południowo-Wschodni Instytut Naukowy, Przemyśl, 1998, vol. 1, pp. 188-189.

<sup>61</sup> Polish peasants sometimes asked for their petitions to be submitted to "the Polish king"; *Raport polityczno-informacyjny Nr. 5 Konsulatu RP w Kijowie*, 18 February 1930, JPI UMW 7/5/76-78.

<sup>62</sup> A. Graziosi, *Collectivisation*, cit., pp. 458, 461. Voroshilov: O. N. Ken, A. I. Rupasov (a cura di), *Politbiuro Ts.K. VKP(b) i otnosheniia SSSR s zapadnymi sosednimi gosudarstvami*, Evropeiskii Dom, Saint Petersburg, 2001, pp. 516-519.

<sup>63</sup> M. Narinskii, *Politika SSSR v Evrope i Pol'sha 1933-1938*, in E. Durachinski, A. N. Sakharov (a cura di), *Sovetsko-pol'skie otnosheniia v politicheskikh usloviakh Evropy 30-kh godov XX stoliia: sbornik statei*, Nauka, Moscow, 2001, p. 29.

Ukraine; Soviet refugees streamed across the border and pleaded for a Polish attack; and Poland's own Ukrainian allies were ready to begin another march on Kyiv. The general staff of the Ukrainian army was as ready as it would ever be for another war with the Soviet Union. In three years of work, Ukrainian officers had been trained, equipment collected, mobilization plans perfected. Mobilization times were down to 10-14 days<sup>64</sup>.

Yet the Polish leadership declined the Ukrainian invasion proposal of June 1930<sup>65</sup>. Polish authorities saw no reason to attack. Even as they observed the strains of collectivization, they saw the Soviet countermeasures. They knew that the size of the border guard was doubled, that the GPU patrolled the border, that whole divisions of the Red Army had been installed<sup>66</sup>. They realized, perhaps, that Soviet authorities had taken measures in advance to integrate border policing and collectivization<sup>67</sup>. Polish observers certainly had ample reason to suspect the scale of Soviet repressions. On 30 January 1930 the Soviet politburo had ordered 15.000 prosperous peasants, or "kulaks", to be sent pre-emptively to "concentration camps" and another 30.000-35.000 to be deported; instructions of 2 February specified that "kulaks were to be liquidated as a class"<sup>68</sup>. On 5 March 1930, in what was perhaps the first purely ethnic deportation in Soviet history, the Politburo ordered 10.000-15.000 families, "in the first line those of Polish nationality", to be deported from Ukrainian and Belarusian border zones<sup>69</sup>. In the event, something like 90.000 people were removed in a "cleansing of counter-revolutionary elements from the border zone" between 20 February and 20 March<sup>70</sup>. This sort of State capacity had to give pause.

Social disorder might have sufficed as a pretext for invasion had Poland been planning a war to liberate Ukraine, as in the March on Kyiv of 1920. Ten years on, Poland had no such intentions. Poland had contingency plans

<sup>64</sup> *Zvit pro pratsiu Sh.M.B.C na I kvitnia 1929 r.*, CAW I/380/2/26/60; *Pratsia I-oї seksii na protiazii 1929 i v rotsi bizbuchim...* [1930], Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe, Rembertów, Poland (CAW) I/380/2/26/ 57-59.

<sup>65</sup> UNR war proposal: R. Potocki, *Polityka państwa polskiego wobec zagadnienia ukraińskiego w latach 1930-1939*, IEAW, Lublin, 2003, pp. 262-272.

<sup>66</sup> Mjr. Stark, Placówka Wywiadowcza Nr. 8, Równe, *Ogólna sytuacja na przedpolu*, to Dowódca Brygady Wołyf in Łuck, 7 April 1930; Por. Medyfski, *Wiadomości zakordonowe*, Równe, 1 April 1930; KOP, Placówka Wywiadowcza Nr. 8, *Raport Wywiadowczy za czas od 15 II do 15 IV 1930 r.*, Równe, 14 April 1930, all in CAW I/303/4/6982.

<sup>67</sup> A. Chandler, *Institutions of Isolation: Border Controls in the Soviet Union and its Successor States, 1917-1993*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal and Kingston, 1998, pp. 64-65.

<sup>68</sup> "Kontslager" and kulaks: V. Danilov, et al. (a cura di), *Tragediia sovetskoj derevni: Kollektivizatsiia i raskulachivanie*, Rosspen, Moscow, 2000, vol. 2, pp. 127, 163 respectively.

<sup>69</sup> T. Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2001, pp. 313-322.

<sup>70</sup> Graziosi, *Collectivisation*, cit., p. 462.

for an invasion of the Soviet Union, but they were defensive in nature. A rapid invasion was meant as a plan of defense in a situation in which war was perceived to be inevitable. In such a situation, the Polish general staff intended to exploit faster mobilization timetables and (Polish generals believed) superior technology to disable the Red Army before it could amass overwhelming force. Tactical victories had to be achieved before the Soviets achieved full mobilization, and before Soviet troops from the east could reach the west. The preemptive incursion into the Soviet Union would require support from Ukrainians, hence the continued Polish relationship with the Ukrainian People's Republic. This required the cultivation of an illusion. The Ukrainians might have imagined that Poland would initiate a war of liberation; but for the Poles, the Ukrainians were an asset to be exploited as necessary in a war the Poles had no intention of beginning. Poland also maintained the Ukrainian People's Republic as a kind of anarchy insurance. Piłsudski and his group believed that the Soviet Union was likely to collapse from its own internal contradictions, and wished to have a Ukrainian government in reserve for this contingency<sup>71</sup>. Warsaw would have been delighted if its propaganda and sabotage had contributed to the collapse of Soviet Ukraine, but had no intention of intervening short of that. Ukrainian patriots in Poland and Ukrainian peasants in Soviet Ukraine were pawns of Polish as well as Soviet policy.

Poland was indeed changing course in its Soviet policy, but towards rapprochement rather than renewed conflict. The numerical imbalance between the Polish Army and the Red Army was rapidly growing. Soviet military spending increased massively in 1931, and again in 1932. Soviet and Polish forces were still comparable in that year (the Polish Army numbered 266,000, and the Red Army numbered 562,000, but deployed over a vast terrain), but the trends were clear<sup>72</sup>. As the Soviets built up their forces, the depression forced severe budget cuts in Polish military spending. As the Soviets began to develop a more modern doctrine of mechanized warfare, the Polish Army remained limited by Piłsudski's antiquated image of a "war of motion"<sup>73</sup>.

<sup>71</sup> *Ukraina: Praca Specjalna*, Report for Second Department, 31 December 1931, CAW I/303/4/5520; Kapitan Tomaszewski, Placówka Wywiadowcza 9 Czortków, KOP, *Wiadomości wojskowe*, 3 April 1930, CAW I/303/4/6982. See the analysis in Potocki, *Polityka państwa polskiego wobec zagadnienia ukraińskiego*, cit., p. 264 and passim.

<sup>72</sup> A. Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland: The Crisis of Constitutional Government 1921-1939*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1972, p. 390.

<sup>73</sup> Soviet doctrine: S. Stoecker, *Forging Stalin's Army: Marshal Tukhachevsky and the Politics of Military Innovation*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1998; M. Habeck, *Storm of Steel: The Development of Armor Doctrine in Germany and the Soviet Union, 1919-1939*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2003.

Old allies had little to offer Warsaw. The British were drifting towards isolation. Poland's defensive alliance with France was directed against Germany, not the Soviet Union. Even as Moscow perceived itself to be open to attack, Warsaw was willing to reconfirm the status quo. Warsaw accepted Moscow's offer to negotiate a non-aggression pact, proposing a draft on 23 August 1931. As collectivization proceeded, Warsaw and Moscow came to terms. The Soviet-Polish non-aggression treaty was signed on 25 July 1932. The Soviet Union continued to present Poland as a threat, but Soviet military planners in the 1930s no longer saw Poland as a power capable of attacking the Soviet Union<sup>74</sup>. The spring of 1930 was probably the last such moment.

### *Stalin's Famine*

A GPU report of late 1931 spoke of the massive slaughter of livestock to prevent its confiscation, and the refusal of communist authorities in many villages to collect the grain. During the winter of 1931-1932 it only got worse. The police reported starvation deaths and mass manifestations. More than 125,000 people in Soviet Ukraine illegally fled the countryside for the city<sup>75</sup>. Stalin and the politburo chose to interpret the problem in terms of the bad faith of Ukrainian peasants and the indiscipline of local cadres.

In June 1932, the Soviet politburo decided that, in order to avoid the mistakes of the past, the party must invade every local space, every household, in order to meet grain targets<sup>76</sup>. On 20 June 1932, the GPU reported that the annual sowing in Ukraine had been carried out under "extremely tense conditions". Peasants were committing suicide rather than starve to death, and cannibalism was already frequent. The peasants were too hungry to work the fields. The GPU could report that it had liquidated 119 "kulak counter-revolutionary organizations" and 35 "counter-revolutionary groups". Some 116,000 more peasants sought to flee the countryside that summer<sup>77</sup>. Peasants and local party leaders alike found the requisition tar-

<sup>74</sup> J. Erickson, *The Soviet Union 1930-1941*, in E. R. May (a cura di), *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessment Before the Two World Wars*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984, pp. 200-201.

<sup>75</sup> 1930 harvest: Graziosi, *Collectivisation*, cit., p. 463. Non-fulfillment of plan, local cadres, and livestock: I. Zelenin et al. (a cura di), *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni: Kollektivizatsiia i raskulachivanie*, Rosspen, Moscow, 2001, vol. 3, pp. 199-200, p. 318, p. 319, p. 324.

<sup>76</sup> *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni*, cit., vol. 3, p. 414. See also G. Kessler, *The Passport System and State Control over Population Flows in the Soviet Union, 1932-1940*, «Cahiers du Monde russe», nn. 2-3-4, 2001, pp. 480-481.

<sup>77</sup> *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni*, cit., vol. 3, pp. 420-422.

gets for 1932, announced in June, to be unrealistic<sup>78</sup>. On 5 August, the GPU spoke of fractions within Ukrainian communism, and of national communists within Ukraine who “carry out the orders of the Second Department”<sup>79</sup>. This, it was to be understood, was the root cause of the resistance of local cadres, whose lax position encouraged the peasants to hoard grain, thereby bringing about the overall failure of Soviet Ukraine to meet the targets for requisitions.

Stalin now displayed his special form of political genius: interpreting the disastrous consequences of his own policies as a reason to punish his political opponents (real or imagined). For, he reasoned, if the Ukrainian peasants were rebelling, this must be the fault of the Second Department; and if the Second Department had penetrated Ukraine, that must be the fault of the Ukrainian party. He expressed the view that the Ukrainian party was a caricature of a communist party, thoroughly penetrated by enemies who aimed to destroy the Soviet Union. As he wrote to Kaganovich, “If we don’t make an effort now to improve the situation in Ukraine, we may lose Ukraine. Keep in mind that Piłsudski is not daydreaming, and his agents in Ukraine are many times stronger” than Ukrainian party leaders believed. He continued: “Keep in mind that the Ukrainian Bolshevik Party (500 *thousand* members, ha-ha) includes not a few (yes, not a few!) rotten elements, conscious and non-conscious Petliurites, as well as direct agents of Piłsudski. As soon as things get worse, these elements will not be slow to open a front inside (and outside) the Party *against* the Party. Worst of all, the Ukrainians simply *do not* see the danger”<sup>80</sup>. Stalin’s ally Lazar Kaganovich agreed that the famine was to be attributed to “Piłsudski’s work”, and that other explanations from Ukrainian comrades were to be disregarded. In his words, “The theory that we Ukrainians are innocent victims creates solidarity and a rotten cover-up for one another not only at the middle level but also in the party leadership”<sup>81</sup>.

Thought it is impossible to be sure, it seems most likely that Stalin grasped that the actual Polish threat was in decline. Piłsudski was ill<sup>82</sup>. Poland had not invaded during the moment of real vulnerability of 1930, had responded to Stalin’s peace initiative in 1931, and had just signed a non-ag-

<sup>78</sup> N. Werth, *La logique de la violence dans l’URSS stalinienne*, in H. Rousso (a cura di), *Stalinism et nazisme: Histoire et mémoire comparées*, Editions Complexe, Paris, 1999, p. 109.

<sup>79</sup> *Tragediia sovetskoï derevni*, cit., vol. 3, p. 443.

<sup>80</sup> Stalin to Kaganovich, 11 August 1932, Y. Cohen, *Des lettres comme actions: Stalin au début des années 1930 vu depuis le fonds Kaganoviā*, «Cahiers du Monde russe», n. 3, 1997, p. 319.

<sup>81</sup> Kaganovich to Stalin, 16 August 1932, in R. W. Davies, et al. (a cura di), *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2003, pp. 183-184.

<sup>82</sup> B. Zongolowicz, *Dzienniki 1930-1936*, Przegląd Wschodni, Warsaw, 2004, p. 169.

gression pact in July 1932. It seems most likely that Stalin, having resolved the Polish threat to his own satisfaction by summer 1932, felt free to exploit its remnants, and indeed the chaos of collectivization, to solidify his own position. Stalin sent trusted men, Lazar Kaganovich and the secret police chief Vsevolod Balyts'kyi, to Ukraine to restore order. Having barely reached Kharkiv from Moscow, Balyts'kyi already knew that the famine was a result of sabotage connected with "the transfer of dozens of Petliurite emissaries and the widespread distribution of Petliurite pamphlets". He was already certain of "the existence in Ukraine of an organized counter-revolutionary insurgent underground, which is connected with foreign countries and the intelligence agencies of foreign States, mainly with the Polish general staff"<sup>83</sup>. Petliurite agents from Poland had indeed run dozens of missions and distributed thousands of pamphlets since 1928. Large groups had been smuggled across the border, including a group of saboteurs. Individual agents had indeed been apprehended. Shubrii had vanished after a border crossing of 16 June 1930, as had Tymko after 28 May 1930. Hanzha had apparently been shot after eight days on Soviet territory in August 1930. Lanovyi, who had crossed in October 1930, was believed to be in Siberian exile<sup>84</sup>. Yet Stalin, Kaganovich, Balyts'kyi and the GPU missed, or pretended to miss, what was obvious to the border crossers themselves: all of this agitation had no political result, opposition to collectivization and patriotic propaganda had not generated a political organization in the countryside. As the Second Section had reported in Warsaw, "The mood of the peasants is completely anti-Bolshevik and very favorable to the Ukrainian People's Republic government, which has made the GPU believe in large conspiratorial Ukrainian People's Republic organizations and expend much effort to discover these organizations. These organizations do not in fact exist"<sup>85</sup>.

Soviet authorities generally blamed failures in the countryside on recalcitrant peasants and foreign propaganda. They did so long before Poland began to spread propaganda encouraging peasants to keep their grain<sup>86</sup>. The reality of Polish propaganda added colorful, and perhaps even convincing, detail to a narrative that served Stalin's power politics. The Polish-Ukrainian plot was

<sup>83</sup> Cited after M. Czech, *Wielki Głód*, «Gazeta Wyborcza», 22-23 March 2003, p. 22. See also I. Shapoval, V. Prystaiko, V. Zolotar'ov (a cura di), *ChK-HPU-NKVD v Ukraïni: Osoby, fakty, dokumenty*, Abrys, Kyïv, 1997, p. 47.

<sup>84</sup> *II-ha sektiia. Stan na I-she liutoho 1931 roku; Dodatok Ch. 1. Vykaz reidiv*, CAW I/380/2/26, p. 97.

<sup>85</sup> *Zvit Ch. 3. 2-i Sektsii za period vid 15 chervnia 1929 roku - 1 chervnia 1930 roku*, CAW I/380/2/26, p. 100.

<sup>86</sup> M. Reiman, *The Birth of Stalinism: The USSR on the Eve of the "Second Revolution"*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1987, pp. 138-150.

presented as a success in 1932 where in fact it had already failed. Piłsudski and Petliura were presented as powerful enemies, when in fact the first was very ill and the second had been dead for six years. Radical measures were taken to restore order and collect foodstuffs, on the incorrect premise that local rule in Ukraine was corrupted by foreign influences. The Ukrainian section of the Bolshevik Party was essentially suspended from its duties. New “Political Departments” composed mainly of outsiders were charged with grain collections and the control of local cadres. Kaganovich sat in judgment on the Ukrainian politburo, forcing its members on the night of 20 December 1932 to commit themselves to new targets for grain requisitions (which, although reduced, amounted to a death sentence for millions). On 29 December the Ukrainian politburo declared that the precondition to fulfilling the plan was the seizure of “family reserves”. In Moscow, the Soviet central committee closed the circle on the Ukrainian peasantry. Peasant flight was also part of a Polish plot to discredit the Soviet Union, and thus peasants must be prevented at all costs from leaving the collective farms. The peasants continued to flee, when they were strong enough. This brought down yet another decree on the “liquidation of the kulaks as such” by deporting people before they could run<sup>87</sup>.

Balyts’kyi found what he was meant to find in Ukraine: Ukrainian nationalism and Polish conspiracy, collaborating to prevent grain collections. He must have known more than what he reported. The head of the Kharkiv GPU, for example, wrote a private note to Balyts’kyi in June 1933: “There are villages where a significant part of the adult population has left for the towns to seek money and bread, leaving the children alone to their fate. In many villages the tremendous majority of collective farm workers and their families are starving, among them many who are sick and swollen with hunger. In many cases no help is given them since there are no reserves whatsoever. In connection with this many people die every day”. He added that: “In parallel the practices of cannibalism and the eating of corpses are spreading. Not uncommon are cases of peasants making use of the bodies of children who have starved to death. There are also a series of known cases in which families kill their weakest members, usually children, and make use of their meat for eating”<sup>88</sup>. By June 1933, peasants had lost their land to collectives, had seen local party leaders replaced by outsiders, had been forbidden to leave for the city or leave Soviet Ukraine, had been banned from buying or selling food, and had been required to surrender any food they had. They starved, by the million.

<sup>87</sup> 20 December: *Tragediia sovetskoï derevni*, cit., vol. 3, p. 603. 29 December: *ivi*, p. 611. January 1933 decree: *ivi*, pp. 634-635.

<sup>88</sup> Czech, *Wielki Głód*, cit., p. 23.

*Stalinism*

Warsaw, meanwhile, was concerned to consolidate its improved relations with Moscow. The non-aggression pact of July 1932 did not improve the difficult conditions in which Poland's diplomats and spies worked in Soviet Ukraine. They found that Ukrainian communists remained very suspicious of Poland, more so than Russian communists. In general Polish intelligence officers working in Soviet Ukraine were consistently surprised by the extent to which Ukrainian officials seemed to believe their own propaganda regarding the Polish threat. Niezbrzycki himself, however, instructed his officers in Ukraine to adapt themselves to the non-aggression pact, and to avoid contacts with Ukrainian patriotic activists, or people who presented themselves as such. Niezbrzycki specifically forbade the Promethean Piotr Kurnicki from pursuing contacts with Petliurites in Kyiv. As he wrote, "we have signed a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, and we want to be loyal, even though they are constantly provoking and blackmailing us"<sup>89</sup>.

Poland's diplomats, like the diplomats of other western powers, were perfectly aware of the mass starvation of 1932 and 1933<sup>90</sup>. Even in Kharkiv and Kyiv, privileged cities that were off limits to the starving peasantry, the famine was impossible to miss. The consul-general in Kharkiv wrote of the huge increase in petitioners in February 1933: "At present everyone wants to return to Poland, everyone is finding real or imaginary claims to Polish citizenship, everyone is complaining of misery and unbearable hunger. Frequently the clients, grown men, cry as they tell of wives and children starving to death or bursting from hunger"<sup>91</sup>. Just appearing at the Polish consulate was a sign of desperation, since almost everyone who did so was arrested and never seen again<sup>92</sup>. Each of the Polish intelligence officers, independently and without orders from above, wrote a report on the hunger. These men and women, who had seen much in life, invariably used a different tone in describing the suffering they saw in 1933. Józefina Pisarczykówna

<sup>89</sup> [Jerzy Niezbrzycki, Warsaw] to [Piotr Kurnicki, Ku, Ukraine], 16 March 1933, CAW I/303/4/1993.

<sup>90</sup> O. Subtelny, *German Diplomatic Reports on the Famine of 1933*; A. Graziosi, *Italian Archival Documents on the Ukrainian Famine 1932-1933*; and J. Koshiw, *The 1932-33 Famine in the British Government Archives* in W. W. Isajiw, *Famine-Genocide in Ukraine, 1932-1933: Western Archives, Testimonies, and New Research*, Ukrainian Canadian Research and Documentation Center, Toronto, 2003, pp. 13-25, pp. 26-48 and pp. 51-65.

<sup>91</sup> J. Karszo-Siedlewski, Polish Consul-General, Kharkiv, 4 February 1933, CAW I/303/4/1867.

<sup>92</sup> Juliusz Łukasiewicz, Poseł RP w Moskwie, *Aresztowanie petentów odwiedzających Konsulat*, 27 March 1933, CAW I/303/4/1867.

wrote from Kharkiv that “the hunger embraces ever more layers of society, and one hears ever more often of cases of cannibalism. On the street one sees the dying and the dead”<sup>93</sup>. A new agent in Kyiv wrote, in a report that was widely distributed in Warsaw, of “cases of death by starvation on the streets and in the courtyards, counted not in the tens but in the hundreds daily”, and of the far worse conditions that prevailed in the countryside. “Cannibalism”, he continued, “has become a habit of sorts. Mortality has reached such heights that there are cases of entire villages that have died out completely”<sup>94</sup>. Writing again in October 1933, the consul concluded that “by this time at least five million people have died”<sup>95</sup>.

Polish intelligence officers believed that the famine had removed all trace of resistance in the Ukrainian countryside<sup>96</sup>. Ukrainian officers, running their own agents into Soviet Ukraine from Poland, were similarly pessimistic. Their network had collapsed under the pressure of budget cuts from Warsaw and increased border policing by Moscow. Total Polish spending on Promethean projects fell by 31 per cent from 1932 to 1933<sup>97</sup>. In June 1933 Ukrainian officers closed one of their three border points, and in October 1933 dismissed the director of the second. Their best agents fell, one after the other. Agent 102, successful on six previous missions in Soviet Ukraine, was probably apprehended by the GPU in February 1933. The GPU reported having shot and killed a Petliurite agent on 3 May 1933. This was probably Agent eight, who in fact returned to Poland on 4 May 1933 heavily wounded. Agent seven was killed by the GPU after crossing the border on 19 September 1933. In the second half of 1933, as famine raged across Soviet Ukraine, only one agent completed any missions at all, and these were brief surveys of the border region. The border crossers’ penetration of Soviet Ukraine was so poor in 1933 that simple reports of general famine were all they could muster<sup>98</sup>.

<sup>93</sup> [Józefina Pisarczykówna, X-22, Kharkiv] to [Jerzy Niezbrzycki], June 1933, CAW I/303/4/2099.

<sup>94</sup> [Placówka B-18, Kyiv] to [Second Department, Warsaw], 6 June 1933, CAW I/303/4/1928.

<sup>95</sup> J. Karszo-Siedlewski, Polish Consul-General, Kharkiv, *Sytuacja na Ukrainie*, 2 October 1933, CAW I/303/4/1881.

<sup>96</sup> [Niezbrzycki] to [Władysław Michniewicz, B-18, Kyiv], *Kochany Panie!* 15 September 1933, CAW I/303/4/1928; [Kurnicki, Ku, Ukraine] to [Niezbrzycki], 18 November 1933, CAW I/303/4/1993; J. Karszo-Siedlewski, Polish Consul-General, Kharkiv, *Sytuacja na Ukrainie*, 2 October 1933, CAW I/303/4/1881.

<sup>97</sup> From 1.450.000 to 1.000.000 zlotys. E. Charaszkiewicz, *Strona finansowa problemu prometejskiego*, Paris, 1 December 1939, JPI TO 38/1/37-48.

<sup>98</sup> *Sprawozdanie Drugiej Sekcji za okres od 1.XI.1932 roku do 1.I.1934 roku*, translation from Ukrainian, [Second Department, Ekspozytura 2, Warsaw], 1934, and attached *Wykaz podróży od 1.IX.1932 r. - do 1.IX.1933 r.*, and *Podróże za czas od 1.IX.1933 do 1.I.1934 roku*, CAW I/303/4/5560. The Ukrainian originals of the first two documents are *Sprawozdania 2-oj Sektsii i*

Petliurite agents were in Soviet Ukraine during the famine, as Stalin said; but they had no direct influence on the course of events.

The only group between Warsaw and Moscow who wanted war in 1933 was the Ukrainian peasantry. Far fewer peasants managed to cross the Polish border in 1933 than in 1930, but refugees' hopes for a war of liberation had only intensified with their plight. Ukrainian peasants "wished that Poland or for that matter any other State would come and liberate them from misery and oppression"<sup>99</sup>. Two covert public opinion surveys ordered by Warsaw found much the same thing. The Soviet-Polish non-aggression pact of July 1932 had come at the worst time for the Ukrainian peasant, since it removed the traditional hope of a liberating war from Poland just as the famine began. Piotr Kurnicki, reported in December 1933 that Ukrainian peasants, in their desperation, could now only hope for a German attack<sup>100</sup>. The only Pole who seems to have considered a war of liberation was, it appears, Józef Piłsudski himself. In September 1933 he ordered the acceleration and completion of a special study of the Red Army in Soviet Ukraine, which was submitted on 19 October. Polish agents in Ukraine were all instructed to pay special attention to nationality work that autumn. The "Old Gentleman", as Niezbrzycki called him, was to make his decision by the end of the year. That decision had fallen by 16 December, and was negative<sup>101</sup>. It appears that Piłsudski had to concede that the mass starvation of the Ukrainian peasantry presented no opportunity for Poland.

In 1933 Stalin no longer expressed concerns about a Polish attack<sup>102</sup>. His "Polish front" and his "peasant front" had both been quieted by the famine. Whether his fears were genuine or manufactured, he had resolved both questions in much the way he had liked. Stalin's willingness to let millions die

*Vykaz reïdiv*, in CAW I/380/2/27 258-265. GPU reports from *Pogranichnye voiska SSSR 1929-1939*, Nauka, Moscow, 1972, p. 72.

<sup>99</sup> Quotation from KOP, Placówka Wywiadowcza Nr. 10, Protokół, Aleksander Kramar, 25 November 1933; see also KOP, Placówka Wywiadowcza No. 8 Równe, "Uciekienierzy z Rosji Sow.", to Szef Ekspozytury Nr. 5 Oddziału II we Lwowie, 24 March 1932; KOP, Placówka Wywiadowcza No. 8, *Rabczyniuk Kirył - protokoł przesłuchanie*, to Szef Ekspozytury Nr. 5 Oddziału II w Lwowie, 5 April 1932, all in CAW I/303/4/6906.

<sup>100</sup> General Żmijenko [Zhmiienko], *Naikharakterniishi pohliady ukraïns'koho selianstva na zemel'nu reformu bolshevikiv*, March 1933, CAW I/303/4/1826; {Kurnicki, Ku, Ukraine} to [Niezbrzycki], 2 December 1933, CAW I/303/4/1993. See also S. Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda, and Dissent, 1934-1941*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p. 94.

<sup>101</sup> The orders: {Niezbrzycki} to [Michniewicz, B-18, Kyïv], *Drogi Panie!*, 23 September 1933, CAW I/303/4/1928; {Niezbrzycki} to [Kurnicki, Ku, Ukraine], 7 December 1933; CAW I/303/4/1993. The decision: [Niezbrzycki] to [Michniewicz, B-18], 16 December 1933, I/303/4/1928. The 19 October report: CAW I/303/4/7039.

<sup>102</sup> *Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence*, cit., pp. 191-192.

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disoriented the Polish intelligence apparatus, leaving the modest ventures of Poland's Prometheans seeming immoral, outmoded, and quaint. The Prometheans' nineteenth-century presupposition that one nation could help another in the interest of all, or at least that Poland could help Ukraine in the interest of Poland, faded into the past.