

FOR YOUR INFORMATION: Letters to the Village Voice

Following are the texts of letters to the editor published by the Village Voice in response to "In Search of a Soviet Holocaust." The first three letters appeared in the February 2 issue of the newspaper, while the fourth appeared on February 9. We reprint them here for the information of our readers.

Dear Editor:

Jeff Coplon's "In Search of a Soviet Holocaust" [January 12] contains so much error and absurdity that I waive his — let us say misleading — account of my life and writings. But he speaks of my scholarly reputation as moribund because of my recent "The Harvest of Sorrow," which was reviewed gratefully well by academics and laymen, in periodicals left and right. He has scraped up some exceptions. Five of these are hardly the admired Sovietologists he claims, arousing embarrassment even in their sympathizers and hilarity elsewhere. These anti-Stalinists say what I recount didn't happen. Moshe Lewin is another matter. He is a distinguished, if eccentric, scholar. He says not so much that it didn't happen as that I shouldn't write about it: odd for a scholar.

That Stalin's moves included a special assault on the Ukraine has been doubted by those who have not seen the evidence. Reviewing my book, Peter Wiles, professor of Russian Social and Economic Studies at the London School of Economics, and Geoffrey Hosking, head of the London School of Slavonic Studies both say they had been skepti-

cal, but now feel I have proved the matter.

Why the misattribution of some photographs (if they are misattributed) should be thought to refute the testimony of vast numbers of eyewitnesses is inexplicable. The same general picture is presented by foreign workers and party activists, by journalists and peasants. Even in Moscow, one can now read of 10 million peasant casualties, of the famine being "artificial," of the special blow at the Ukraine. As to figures, the leading Soviet scholar in the field, V.P. Danilov, gives a Soviet population deficit for 1930-1937 of 15 to 16 million. (I was not able to use this originally, but it is in my paperback edition.) But perhaps the clearest summing up of the whole Stalin policy was made by Vasily Grossman, the Soviet Union's leading writer on the Jewish Holocaust: "The decree required that the peasants of the Ukraine, the Don, and the Kuban be put to death by starvation, be put to death along with their little children."

Grossman (whose own mother was gassed at Treblinka) gives a moving account of Ukrainian sufferings, and makes the comparison with the Holocaust as an inhuman crime. Of course the Holocaust was unique. But it is disgraceful to say that finding high figures for the Ukrainian dead means denigrating the Holocaust.

And this left-right stuff is nonsense. My views on the Stalinist era are those of Stephen Cohen and Roy Medvedev, of the Italian Communists and many in Moscow. A Serbo-Croatian edition of

"The Harvest of Sorrow" is due out in Belgrade shortly. But what I enjoyed most in Coplon's piece was his charge that I and others "red-baited" New York Timesman Walter Duranty. Duranty wasn't a red at all, just a self-serving liar; what's more, he admitted this, giving the death toll of the famine whose existence he had denied as seven to eight million, and possibly as high as 10 million. I think liars should be baited. Dupes, too, perhaps less harshly.

Robert Conquest
Stanford, Calif.

Dear Editor:

Let the quote attributed to me by Jeff Coplon in "In Search of a Soviet Holocaust" leave an erroneous impression with any of your readers, please permit me to state for the record my view that the fact that a famine of tragic magnitude took place in the Ukraine during the early 1930s cannot seriously be questioned. Nor can there be any doubt that it took an enormous toll in innocent human life or that the regime of Josef Stalin must bear the lion's share of the blame.

Eli M. Rosenbaum
Washington

Dear Editor:

The thesis of Jeff Coplon's "In Search of a Soviet Holocaust" seems to be that those who observed or wrote about the Ukrainian famine were Nazi collaborators or fascists. Among such "Nazis" he might have mentioned Harry Lang, editor of the Jewish Daily Forward; the Mennonite Central Committee; and Christian Science Monitor Moscow correspondent William Henry Chamberlain.

In my own work, I have had the cooperation of individuals and institutions that even a Coplon would be hard-pressed to portray as closet Nazis. They include the Institute of the International Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide, in Jerusalem (which has published some of my work on the famine); the American Jewish Committee, whose representative testified in favor of creating a Commission on the Ukraine Famine; the Hartford branch of the National Conference of Christians and Jews (which prepared a teachers' guide not unlike New York's); and the Institute for the Study of Genocide, founded by Simon Wiesenthal, where Coplon could have gone to a November 13 conference at which I discussed my work.

While no responsible scholar of genocide should tolerate any attempt to equate the Ukrainian famine and the Holocaust, neither should they attempt to diminish the significance of what Stalin did to the Ukrainians.

Coplon claims that so-called "feminologists" reject Soviet sources in favor of "unverifiable emigre accounts." Untrue. It is precisely the Soviet sources which are most useful in tracing the policies which caused and responded to the famine. They show that by late 1931, Soviet agriculture was exhausted by the forcible procurement of produce. Molotov responded by declaring that a drought had crippled agriculture in the Volga Basin, and limited aid was mobilized. In July 1932, the central authorities were warned of impending famine in the Ukraine. Stalin responded in October by intensifying grain seizures. In January 1933, Stalin took direct control of the Ukrainian party in order to break any manifestation of political and cultural self-assertion.

The reason there is controversy on the issue of how many people Stalin killed is because in 1937 Stalin had his census officials shot for not finding enough people. Lastly, Coplon accuses the Reaganites of exploiting the famine by backing the creation of the U.S. Commission on the Ukraine Famine. Actually, the legislation creating it was introduced by two New Jersey Democrats, Senator Bill Bradley and Congressman Jim Florio, and the administration initially opposed it.

James E. Mace
Staff Director
Commission on the Ukraine Famine
Washington

Dear Editor:

In comparison with the rest of Jeff Coplon's "In Search of a Soviet Holocaust" [January 12], the misrepresentations he makes that relate to me are positively benign; nevertheless, they are there. Despite Coplon's assertion, I had nothing to do with the New York Department of Education's decision to include an excerpt from my book in its current curriculum guide on the Nazi Holocaust. Nor did I have anything at all to do with developing the third volume of that series, the one containing the expanded treatment of the Ukrainian famine, because I had resigned earlier from the advisory board (although the Department of Education never took the trouble to remove my name from the roster) in protest over the Department's decision to delete the original 17-page section on the famine from the first volume. And I told Mr. Coplon all of that when he interviewed me by phone; but then, what is the big deal about veracity when one is in the hunt for much bigger game — exposing the great Ukrainian menace!

I have furthermore, never in my life been a "point man" for "Ukrainian nationalists" or anyone else. Nor am I, in contrast to what Coplon thinks of many Ukrainian-Americans, an "emigre" or the son of a former member of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, as my parents happen to have been opponents of the OUN from the outset, and my grandparents were socialists.

But being a critic of OUN-style nationalism does not give one a license to lie at will, unless, of course, one has one's own hidden agenda. My uncle was an inmate at Auschwitz because he was an OUN member. Both parents of a childhood friend were likewise inmates at Auschwitz because they were members of the OUN. Two brothers of the OUN's leader, Stepan Bandera, died as inmates at Auschwitz, while Bandera and his top cohorts spent the war at Sachsenhausen. Yet Coplon makes the incredible allegation that the OUN "pulled the triggers at Babi Yar and Sobibor," and "ran the gas chambers at Treblinka."

But perhaps not even that is quite as striking as Coplon's venomous hatred of all that is Ukrainian. What the Jew is to the anti-Semite, the Ukrainian is to Coplon and his ilk. His lies are not simply lies; they are the work of a provocateur who means to cause great mischief, such as when he floats the scurrilous allegation that any of those of us who tried to bring the story of the famine to light have anything to do with the crazies who deny that the Nazi Holocaust took place.

Bohdan Vitvitsky
Maplewood, N.J.

FOR THE RECORD: N.Y. Times response

Reprinted below is the full text of a letter written by John P. Hewko of Arlington, Va., to Max Frankel, executive editor of The New York Times, regarding the newspaper's treatment of the Great Famine of 1932-33. Below Mr. Hewko's letter is a photoreproduction of Mr. Frankel's letter, with his succinct reply: "Thank you for your opinion."

Dear Mr. Frankel:

I was shocked and dismayed to read in The Ukrainian Weekly (December 20, 1987) that you apparently regard as something that "doesn't seem to qualify as news" Dr. James Mace's assertion that The New York Times and its correspondent in the Soviet Union, Mr. Walter Duranty, may have been less than truthful in their reporting of the Great Ukrainian Famine of 1932-33. If it is not newsworthy that Mr. Duranty, the recipient of one of journalism's most prestigious awards, and The New York Times, arguably one of the leading newspapers in the world, may have been consciously covering up one of the greatest genocides in the history of mankind, then I don't know what is.

As someone who has spent five of the last 10 years studying and working in African, European and South American countries where freedom and human rights are less than cherished, I have come to learn through personal experience the absolute necessity for a free and unbridled press. A free press, however, must be held to the same ethical and professional standards that it, as the self-proclaimed "watchdog of the people," demands of those individuals and institutions that it writes about.

Your callous comment (assuming your secretary accurately conveyed your opinion to The Ukrainian Weekly) was a slap in the face not only to the 6 million Ukrainians who perished in the

famine and their descendants living in this country, but to the families of the victims of the Jewish, Armenian and Cambodian holocausts, all of whom are desperately attempting to combat the "out of sight, out of mind" philosophy that your response seems to favor. After all, as has been repeated countless times by your publication and others, it is only by keeping the memory of the Jewish and other holocausts from disappearing that we can ensure that similar tragedies will not be repeated again.

The New York Times would do a great deal to uphold its honor and integrity as a journalistic institution by openly facing up to any mistakes it may have committed in the past. Although the Great Ukrainian Famine may be an event that "belongs in history books," The Times owes it to its readership and to itself to set the record straight. A step in the right direction would be to call for Mr. Duranty to be posthumously stripped of his Pulitzer Prize.

Yours sincerely,
John P. Hewko

