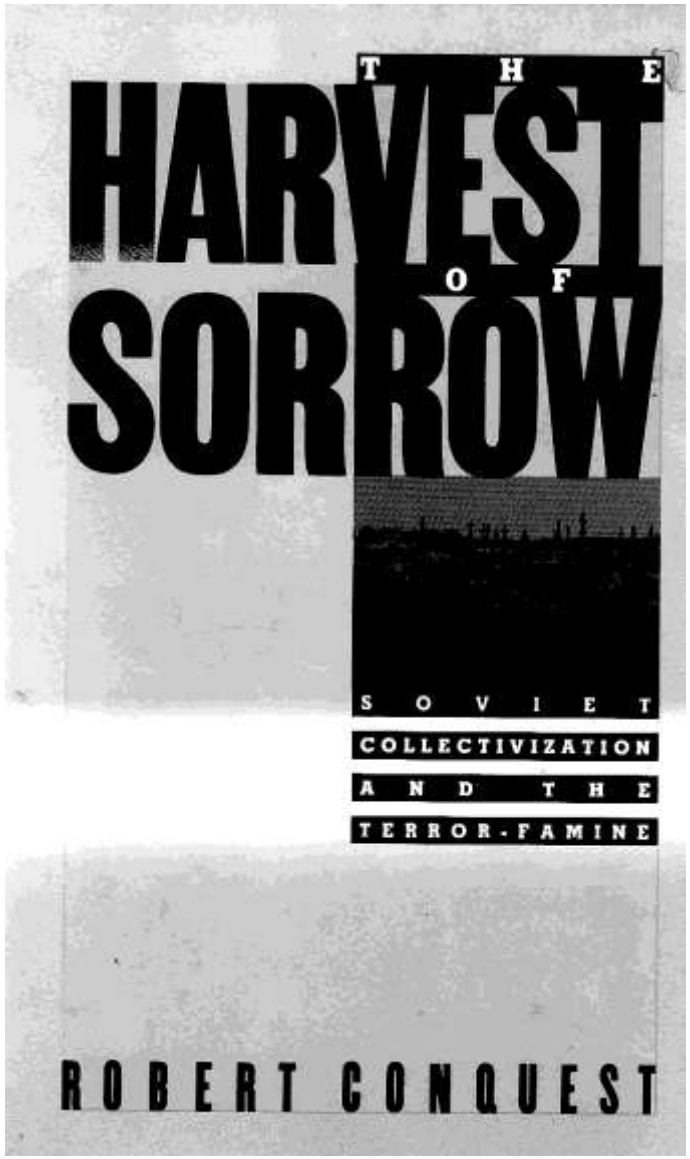

15

Children

Pianger senti' fra il sonno i miei figliuoli
Ch' eran con meco, e domandar del pane

Dante

A whole generation of rural children, in the USSR as a whole but especially in the Ukraine, was destroyed or maimed. And, clearly the significance of this to the Soviet future cannot be overstated. From a humanitarian point of view, it need hardly be said that the fate of children in this great disaster seizes the mind most strongly; but it is also true that in the perspective of the country's future, both the shrinkage of a generation and the experiences of the survivors have effects which are still felt.

The photographs we have of children, even infants, with limbs like sticks and skull-like heads, are heartrending, as always in such circumstances. And this time, unlike even the Soviet famine of 1921, there are no accompanying pictures of relief workers trying, however much against the odds, to save them.

One observer notes of a survivor 'The poor youngster had seen so many deaths and so much suffering that he seemed to think it all part of life. There was no other life for him. The children always accepted the horrors of their environment as a matter of course'.[1]

*

The war on children was justified by the necessities of history, and absence of 'bourgeois' sentimentalism in enforcing the Party's decision was made the test of a true Communist.

In 1929 already, an educational paper noted how 'some comrades

coming in for grain procurements recommend doing everything to encourage the incidents of persecution of kulaks' children that occur in school, using this persecution as a means of putting pressure on the kulak parents who are maliciously holding back grain. Following their advice, one has to observe how the class tensions among the children became acute, beginning with teasing the little children and usually ending in a fight'.[2]

When a district committee secretary said that enough seed should be left to kulaks to sow and feed their children, he was attacked: 'don't think of the kulak's hungry children; in the class struggle philanthropy is evil'.[3] Up in Archangel, in 1932–3, the destitute children of deported 'kulaks' were not given school lunches or clothing vouchers available to others.[4]

There was logic in this attitude. An economic class, such as the 'kulaks', which the regime was concerned to crush, consists of children as well as adults. Moreover, Marx's idea that economics determines consciousness was applied in a very direct fashion – for example, the surviving children of kulaks, even if separated from their families, carried their social stigma in their identity documents, and on that basis were denied education and jobs, and were always liable to arrest in periods of vigilance.

The involvement of children in their family's offences was traditional. From the shooting of the fourteen year old Tsarevich in 1918, to that of the fourteen year old son of the old Bolshevik Lakoba in 1937, is a logical step. In the 1930s children, like wives, were often sentenced under the rubric ChSIR – Member of the Family of a Traitor to the Fatherland – a charge impossible to disprove.

Kulak children were often left abandoned when both their parents were arrested. As Lenin's widow Krupskaya wrote in an educational publication, 'A young child's parents are arrested. He goes along the street crying . . . Everyone is sorry for him, but no one can make up his mind to adopt him, to take him into his home: "After all, he is the son of a kulak . . . There might be unpleasant consequences" '.[5] Krupskaya herself pleaded against this, on the grounds that the class-war was between adults, but her voice had long ceased to count.

Yet there were many occasions when adults were braver or more decent than Krupskaya feared. We hear of cases where (for example) the father gone, the mother simply dying of fatigue in the fields, some fellow workers took in her child.[6] A typical story of such kindness is of a small Ukrainian peasant refusing to join the kolkhoz and being arrested, beaten up and deported. His wife then hanged herself in their barn and a childless family took in their little boy. He spent his time haunting his deserted home, coming back to them only to sleep on the oven, never speaking.[7] Time and again we have such stories of 'orphans of collectivization' being taken in by

peasants.

Sometimes a man's foresight and ingenuity saved his family, at least for a time. One survivor tells of arriving home from school at the age of ten, and finding the house empty and locked. His father had been arrested and his mother and the younger children were being put up by a poor peasant family. To save these, she told him and his twelve year old brother to shift for themselves. The father, however, escaped and travelled working as a shoemaker, telling those he served to send food to his family instead of paying him. He had also taken the precaution of burying food on the property of a local activist, where it would not normally be searched for. The boys managed with this, and also fished, when able to evade the patrols which now prevented this where possible.[8]

But such help – or any help – might not be available, for obvious reasons. One boy who escaped from a deportation train, some months later visited his native *khutir*. It was deserted, the roof torn off, weeds man-high, polecats nesting in the ruined cottages.[9]

Young children, as we have noted, formed a high proportion of the 15–20% dying on the train in the deportations of 1930–32, and many more died in exile.[10] In March, April and May 1930 nearly 25,000 children are reported dying in the churches of Vologda,[11] the way-stations to exile of which we spoke in Chapter 6.

Children of those simply expelled from their homes, or escaping from exile, lived at the margin of existence, and many died. As with the adults, it is impossible to say exactly how many were victims of the deportation, how many of the famine; but the indications are that famine was the greater killer.

When it struck in 1932, the Ukrainian peasant children led a dreadful life. Not only was there the ever increasing hunger, but the mental strain on the family which sometimes led to the breakdown of its mutual love. We have already quoted Vasily Grossman's remark that mothers sometimes came to hate their children, though in other cases 'love was unbreakable . . .' In one family the husband refused to let the wife feed the children, and when he found a neighbour giving them some milk reported him for hoarding, though without result. However, he did not survive and the children did . . .[12]

In other cases, the lunacy of starvation led, as we have seen, to cannibalism, and many of the accounts we have are of children being eaten by a parent.

More generally, there was simple starvation. Sometimes this led to heartrending choices. One woman, congratulated in the spring of 1934 on her three fine children said that she had had six, but decided to save the 'three strongest and cleverest' and let the others die, burying them behind

the house.[13]

An agronomist describes finding, on a walk with another official between two villages, a young woman dead, with a living baby at her breast. He saw from her passport that she was twenty-two years old and had walked about thirteen miles from her own village. They handed the baby – a girl – in to the nutrition centre at their destination, and wondered if anyone would ever tell her what became of her mother.[14]

Arthur Koestler saw from his train starving children who 'looked like embryos out of alcohol bottles';[15] or, as he puts it elsewhere: 'the stations were lined with begging peasants with swollen hands and feet, the women holding up to the carriage windows horrible infants with enormous wobbling heads, stick-like limbs and swollen, pointed bellies . . .'[16] And this was of families with at least the strength to reach the railway line.

There are many such descriptions of the physical condition of the children. Grossman gives one of the fullest descriptions of how they looked, and how it got worse as the famine closed in: 'And the peasant children! Have you ever seen the newspaper photographs of the children in the German camps? They were just like that: their heads like heavy balls on thin little necks, like storks, and one could see each bone of their arms and legs protruding from beneath the skin, how bones joined, and the entire skeleton was stretched over with skin that was like yellow gauze. And the children's faces were aged, tormented, just as if they were seventy years old. And by spring they no longer had faces at all. Instead, they had birdlike heads with beaks, or frog heads – thin, wide lips – and some of them resembled fish, mouths open. Not human faces'. He compares this directly with the Jewish children in the gas chambers and comments, 'these were Soviet children and those who were putting them to death were Soviet people'.[17]

In many cases the children simply died at home with the whole family. The last survivors might be the children, with no real idea of what to do. A foreign journalist describes a cabin in a village near Kharkov where only a fourteen year old girl and a two and a half year old brother survived. 'This younger child crawled about the floor like a frog, and its poor little body was so deformed that it did not resemble a human being . . . [It] had never tasted milk or butter, and had only once in its life tasted meat. Black bread and potatoes in very rare quantities had been the sole nourishment of this infant that had been on the point of death many times in the past winter'. At the time of his arrival they had not eaten for two days.[18] Others might wander off with no special hope: 'By the roadside between Kryzhivka Budyscha, in the orrach near Budyshcha pond, at the end of June were found the bodies of two children – one about seven years old and the other perhaps ten. Who knows whose children they were? Nobody seemed to

have missed them, no one asked for them, they perished like kittens . . .'[19]

*

In a desperate situation, parents would send their children off, in the hope that they would have a chance to survive in the world of begging and petty theft which would not be theirs if they remained with their families.

A former Red partisan and activist in Chornukhy, Poltava Province, had joined the collective farm in 1930 with his wife and five children and been a loyal kolkhoznik. When death by starvation was imminent he took his four surviving children (one had been knocked dead while stealing vegetables) to the district chief, asked for help, but could get no definite promise. He then left the children with the official, who put them in a children's home, where two of them soon died. A few days later the father hanged himself on a tree outside the district office.[20]

A boy of seven said that after his father had died and his mother swelled up and could not get up, she told him 'go and find food for yourself'; a boy of eight left when both parents died; a boy of nine, whose mother had died, became frightened of his father's inexplicable movements and left home; another boy of nine was told by his mother to save himself, both of them crying as he left; a boy of eight saw his parents lying swollen and helpless and left.[21]

Sometimes the mother would wander off with her last baby. There are many stories of mother and infant lying dead on the road or in a city street; others of a dead woman with a still living infant at her breast.[22] Some would abandon a small child at a door, or simply anywhere, on the mere chance that someone might help it as she could not. 'A peasant woman dressed in something like patched sacks appeared from a side path. She was dragging a child of three or four years old by the collar of a torn coat, the way one drags a heavy bag-load. The woman pulled the child into the main street. Here she dropped it in the mud . . . The child's little face was bloated and blue. There was foam round the little lips. The hands and tiny body were swollen. Here was a bundle of human parts, all deathly sick, yet still held together by the breath of life. The mother left the child on the road, in the hope that someone might do something to save it. My escort endeavoured to hearten me. Thousands and thousands of such children, he told me, had met a similar fate in the Ukraine that year'.[23]

Another account tells us 'In Kharkov I saw a boy, wasted to a skeleton, lying in the middle of the street. A second boy was sitting near a keg of garbage picking eggshells out of it . . . When the famine began to mount, the parents in the villages used to take their children into the towns, where they left them in the hope that someone would have pity on them'.[24] They

often died in the first day or two: they were usually in poor condition anyway. One seen dying in a gutter in Kharkov is described as having a 'skin covered with an unhealthy whitish down like fungus'.[25]

There were other dangers. Criminals even set up a regular slaughterhouse for children in Poltava, eventually discovered by the GPU, (and this was not a unique case, at least two similar ones being reported).[26]

If the children survived, it would be because they fell in with established groups. At the Kharkov Tractor Plant, all the unfinished buildings were occupied by homeless children. They trapped birds, rummaged through garbage for fishheads or potato peelings, caught and cooked any surviving cats, and begged.[27]

Criminal children's gangs at railway stations are typically noted as sometimes consisting of twelve to fourteen year olds, sometimes even five to six year olds.[28] It was mainly a matter of petty larceny. In a poll taken (at an earlier date) in a reception centre for homeless boys in Leningrad, a questionnaire about 'hooligans' – i.e. petty criminals – given to seventy-five twelve to fifteen year olds, got the following typical answers:

> 'A hooligan is a homeless boy who because of the power of hunger has to be a hooligan'.
>
> A hooligan is 'a thief who escapes from an orphanage'.
>
> 'There was a family, they had a son. When mother and father died, the boy became a homeless one, so he became a hooligan'.
>
> 'Hooligans appear when parents die and they are left all alone . . .'
>
> 'A mother and a father die, a son remains, he is turned over to the orphanage, but he escapes and becomes a hooligan'.[29]

It was in fact the only life available to many.

There were other fates: of children who managed to find distant relatives, or of older children getting some sort of employment. But many were eventually assimilated into the old criminal element of the *urkas* which had flourished as a separate culture, with its own laws and dialect, since the early 17th century.

The *urkas* proper seem to have numbered between half a million and a million by the 1940s. The young element, of teenage boys whose personalities had never been 'socialized', are universally reported in labour camps and prisons as the most terrifying, with no compunction whatever about killing for the slightest motives.

But for the present most of the children kept in their own groups, and presented a problem for the authorities.

*

A great stream of orphans, the 'homeless ones' (*bezprizorniye*), had flowed over the country following the famine of 1921–2. Relief organizations reported 'fugitive bands of a dozen or more, led by a child of ten or twelve and including now and then a baby in arms'.[30] This had all been admitted by the authorities. Even Soviet novelists of the time had taken it as a theme – as with Shishkov's *Children of Darkness*, describing a colony of children living under a large abandoned boat on the riverside, with robbery, sex, drug-taking, and finally murder.

The *Large Soviet Encyclopaedia*'s current (3rd) edition, says that the number of children needing direct help from the state was four to six million in 1921, and two and a half to four million in 1923. In 1921–2 five million had received help in the Volga region alone, and in 1923 more than a million. In 1921 940,000 had been in children's homes, in 1924 280,000, in 1926, 250,000, in 1927–8 159,000; no later figures or information are given except the bare statement that the problem was basically liquidated by the mid-1930s.

In spite of the *Encyclopaedia*'s view that homeless children were a phenomenon of the 20s, with nothing worth recording in later years, there are plenty of official accounts available from the period of the famine.

One ploy was to blame it on the kulaks:

> Some difficulties in food-supply in certain areas of the country have been used with the purpose of raising the level of homelessness among children in the cities. 'Send the children to the cities, let the state take care of them in the orphanages . . .' Local leaders in public education have not always or everywhere understood this to be a kulak trick. And instead of combating this trick, the rural [education] workers felt compassion. For the rural workers the easiest way to get rid of the children was to send them to the city. And the kulak is using this. The District Executive Committees and especially the village soviets frequently themselves issued papers to a child and sent him to the city institutions responsible for the protection of childhood. The city accepted these children. As a result, the existing children's institutions were overcrowded; new ones were created, but the street orphans not only did not disappear but new contingents kept arriving . . . Homelessness grew, particularly in the North Caucasus.[31]

In 1935, it was announced that the placing of 'direct and immediate responsibility for the care of children on the village soviets and collective farms . . . finally creates the conditions for putting a stop to the appearance of homeless and unprovided-for children. This measure finally creates the possibility of stopping the flow of unprovided-for children from the countryside to the cities with the purpose of entering orphanages'.[32] At this time official figures were that 75% of the homeless

children were from the countryside.[33]

One Soviet authority claims that owing to the success of industrialization and collectivization, the problem of homeless children was fully solved: 'This is one of the most remarkable testimonies to the fact that only the socialist regime can rescue the growing generation from starvation, pauperism, and homelessness – the inevitable companions of the bourgeois society'.[34]

Another comment on the superiority of Soviet treatment of these orphans should perhaps also be registered. At a meeting of the Commissariat of Education, the Deputy People's Commissar, M.S. Epstein, 'compared the care by our Party and its leaders for children with the horrifying status of children in the capitalist countries. The falling number of schools, the tremendous growth of homelessness – that is characteristic of all capitalist countries. There are over 200,000 homeless children and adolescents in the USA now. Juvenile courts, juvenile correction halls and shelters maim the children; the entire system of measures of the bourgeois states is geared toward the 'elimination from sight' of the homeless children by the way of their physical elimination'.[35]

Professor Robert C. Tucker has a theory that whatever the Soviet press accused an enemy of was exactly what the Soviet Government was doing itself. It is perhaps relevant that we are told in an official journal that in the North Caucasus, where the problem of homeless children was particularly acute, it was 'liquidated' in two months by measures taken, (which, however, are not described).[36] As we shall see, the solutions available were not limited by humanitarian considerations.

•

There were 'children's labour camps', that is prison camps, to which a child might be formally sentenced. After the arrest and deportation of one 'kulak', a brigade came to his house to check on grain, and tried to arrest his wife. Her young son, who had a bandaged hand from an abscess, held on to her. One of the brigade hit him on the hand and he fainted. The mother escaped in the confusion and got away to the woods. Thereupon the boy was arrested instead and two weeks later tried on a charge of attacking the brigade leader with a knife. Though one of the brigade, to the disgust of the court, told the true story, the boy was nevertheless sentenced to five years in a 'children's labour colony'.[37]

Children treated in such a way were not cooperative. A recent account by the former head of an NKVD children's 'labour colony' describes the young criminals as free in their irreverence about Soviet matters. In one revolt, they barricaded themselves in an office and shouted that they were

going to burn down 'the prison of the peoples', a parody of Lenin's description of Tsardom; and they went on to burn all the documents and personal files.[38]

Many more, however, landed in regular adult prisons or camps. One prisoner mentions a nine year old in his Kharkov prison cell along with all the adults.[39]

But even non-'criminal' homeless children were effectively penalized. In March 1933 at the Poltava railway station a special railway car was drawn into a siding and the children who swarmed round the station seeking food were put in it, under guard. There were about seventy-five of them, and they were given roasted grain coffee-substitute and a little bread. They died off quickly, and were buried in holes in the ground. A station worker comments, 'This procedure became so common at that time that nobody paid the slightest attention to it'.[40]

In Verkhnedniprovsk on the right bank of the Dnieper about 3,000 orphans aged from seven to twelve years old, children of executed or deported kulaks, were similarly held, starving to death in the spring and summer of 1933.[41]

A lecturer in botany writes of the child mortality he witnessed in Kirovohrad. In Kirovohrad there used to be a bazaar which was liquidated at the same time as private trade, and some of the buildings left vacant were turned into orphanages. Peasants would bring their children to town and leave them so that they would be taken in. During the famine the orphanage became so overcrowded that it could no longer hold all the children. Then the children were transferred to a 'children's town' where they could ostensibly live 'under the open sky'. They got nothing to eat and starved to death away from the public eye, their deaths being listed as caused by a weakness of the nervous system. A walled fence surrounded it, so that people could not see in, but they could hear 'frightening, inhuman cries . . . women crossed themselves and fled from the place'. To hide the extent of the deaths, trucks would haul off the bodies only at night. They fell off the truck so often that every morning each caretaker would look over his 'territory' to see if a child's body had fallen there. The burial pits would be filled so high and covered so poorly that dogs and wolves would partly dig the bodies up. Dr Chynchenko estimates that thousands of children died this way in Kirovohrad.[42]

Even less improvised 'orphanages' might be highly unpleasant. One official of the Commissariat of Education tells of being entertained at a privileged summer camp for children at Ulyanivka. After a fine meal another official approached him quietly and said he would show him another 'Children's Shelter' a quarter of a mile out of the village. Here was a barn built of stone, the floor covered with sand and in the

semidarkness about 200 children from two to twelve years old in the condition of skeletons, dressed only in dirty shirts. They all cried for bread. When the education official asked who was looking after them he received the sardonic reply 'the Party and the Government' – the looking after consisting of the removal of the corpses each morning.[43]

One girl, taken in a bad condition to Chornukhy children's home, was loaded on to a truck of corpses, but the mass grave had not been dug, so she and the dead were just piled up, and she crawled off, being rescued and looked after by the wife of a Jewish doctor. This doctor, Moisei Feldman, saved numbers of starving people by getting them into his hospital under false diagnoses and feeding them; and was often in trouble because of this.[44]

Elsewhere one ten year old boy was taken with his six year old sister, after their parents' death, to a local orphanage – an old peasant house with broken windows, where food was insufficient. The nurse in charge had the older children dig the graves up at the cemetery and bury the dead inmates. He finally did this for his own sister.[45]

Some children's homes, in the actual villages of their birth, are described as well run. But the boys brought up in them were, we are told, the first to desert from the Soviet Army in 1941.[46]

Early in 1930, when the pressures were comparatively low, the orphanages were already in a poor state. One education periodical complained: 'Materially the children are exceedingly unprovided for; nutrition is insufficient, in many orphanages there is filth, lice-infestation, lack of discipline, lack of habits for collective life'.[47]

A Government decree on the liquidation of child homelessness on 31 May 1935,[48] noted that

> a) the majority of orphanages are managed unsatisfactorily as far as housekeeping and education are concerned;
>
> b) the organized struggle with juvenile hooliganism and criminal elements among the children and adolescents is utterly insufficient and in a number of places is completely non-existent;
>
> c) up till now conditions have not been created under which children, who for one reason or another ended up 'on the street' (loss of parents or running away, escape from orphanages, etc.), would be immediately placed in the proper juvenile institutions or returned to the parents;
>
> d) parents and guardians indifferent to their own children and allowing them to engage in hooliganism, stealing, sexual corruption, and vagabondage are not held responsible.

– This last, an accurate description of the homeless ones' life.

The decree established orphanages under the Commissariat of

Education, homes (for sick children) under the Commissariat of Health, and 'isolators, labour colonies and reception stations' – under the NKVD, which was now to take over all matters of juvenile delinquency.

Homeless children, as the decree notes, often escaped from these homes, which they usually reported as brutally run.[49] The Gorki Commune near Kharkov was noted for 'little food and plenty of discipline'.[50] An educational organ gave as an 'example' of inadequate work that at the orphanage at Nizhne Chirski 'the delivery of proper food was delayed for months'.[51]

A modern Soviet novelist lived with other homeless ones in an abandoned theatre, and reports tales of terrible orphanages.[52] But there were indeed exceptions. For example, the novelist himself, (V.P. Astafiev), was in an orphanage in Igarka in the far North. In his *Theft* he has a more or less autobiographical account of this: the head of the orphanage is a very decent man, much respected by the inmates, (though getting into trouble when it is discovered that he is a former Tsarist officer).

Most, though, seem to have been little more than children's prisons. Even so, many children passed through the police-run homes and went on to respectable careers. Others were recruited to crime. And others, by a horrible irony, became suitable material for entry into the ranks of the NKVD itself. Even the comparatively humane Cheka children's homes of the 1920s had already been recruiting ground for the Secret Police.[53]

At the Belovechensk 'children's colony' near Maikop in the North Caucasus, we are told that 'half of the boys who were inmates in the school were sent, on reaching the age of sixteen, to special NKVD schools to be trained as future Chekists'. These were often from the more unsocialized criminal element. One, who had earlier escaped on two occasions with some friends, once murdering a peasant, once setting fire to a church, was some years later recognized by a local resident under arrest in Baku, as one of his Secret Police interrogators.[54]

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It is indeed a horrible moral irony that children whose parents had been killed by the regime should be indoctrinated and brutalized into becoming the most obnoxious of that regime's agents.

But there are many other points about the attitudes and actions of the regime towards children in this period which have been regarded by some as a spiritual destruction no less intolerable, perhaps even more intolerable, than the physical holocaust of the rural young.

We may find it disagreeable to hear a Komsomol's description of an

indoctrination film he and his friends were shown of kulaks burying wheat, Komsomols discovering the wheat, and then being murdered by the kulaks.[55] We may not relish one observer noting at a round-up of starving peasants in Kharkov that 'the children of well-fed Communist officials, young Pioneers, stood by and parroted phrases of hate learned in school'.[56] We may be repelled by a 'pioneer brigade' arresting two women, (whose husbands had been killed and exiled respectively) for gleaning two or three ears of corn; (they were sent to concentration camps in the far North).[57] The Pioneers, (of the Communist organization for children between ten and fifteen) had many similar triumphs. In one kolkhoz four of them were praised for throwing a kulak woman to the ground and holding her till help arrived and the militia took her away to be sentenced under the decree of 7 August 1932. 'This was the first victory of the kolkhoz's Pioneers'.[58]

In a kolkhoz at Ust-Labinsk in the Kuban a contemporary official account tells approvingly of how 'the Pioneer detachment presented the Political Department with a whole list of people they suspected of thieving, based on the class principle: 'We, the children's "Camp" of the kolkhoz *Put' Khleboroba*, announce to the Political Department that so-and-so certainly steals, because he is a kulak and in the hamlet of Razdomny his mother-in-law was dekulakised'. They had learnt in the detachment to speak the class language'.[59]

Children were in fact mobilized to keep watch on the fields – Postyshev says that over half a million of them served thus, with ten thousand specifically 'combatting thieves' – that is, peasants trying to keep a little grain.[60] *Pravda* quoted a 'Song of the Kolkhoz Pioneer', by the Stalinist hack A. Bezymenski, which included such verses as

> We take the thieves to jail
> To intimidate the foe.
> We guard the village soil
> To let the harvest grow.
>
> We'll round up all the shirkers:
> To the fields we'll make them march,
> And then we'll man the checkpoints
> And keep a careful watch.[61]

As to the children and youths of 15 and over, we are told that in general 'the Komsomols took an active part in all economic-political campaigns and fought the kulak relentlessly'.[62] Indeed, in Krushchev's time it was stated that in Stalin's view, 'the very first task of all Komsomol education was the necessity to seek out and recognise the enemy, who was then to be

removed forcibly, by methods of economic pressure, organizational–political isolation, and methods of physical destruction'.[63]

This general harnessing of the young to the brutalities and falsification of the class struggle will certainly be distasteful to most of those not accustomed to such standards of conduct. Yet, there is, from our point of view, an even baser phenomenon to be found.

Already at the Shakhty trial, a boy was publicly quoted as demanding the death sentence for his father. And in the countryside, children who had accepted the indoctrination of the 'Pioneer' were used against their own families. The most famous was that of the celebrated Pavlik Morozov, after whom the Palace of Culture of Young Pioneers in Moscow is named. The fourteen year old Morozov 'unmasked' his father, previously head of the village Soviet in the village of Gerasimovka. After the trial and sentence on the father, Morozov was killed by a group of peasants, including his uncle, and is regarded as a martyr. There is now a Pavlik Morozov Museum in his village: 'in this timbered house was held the court at which Pavlik unmasked his father who sheltered the kulaks. Here are reliquaries dear to the heart of every inhabitant of Gerasimovka'.[64] In 1965 the village was additionally adorned with his statue. We are told by the current *Large Soviet Encyclopaedia* that Morozov, with others in similar case (Kolya Myagotin, Kolya Yakovlev, Kychan Dzhakylov), is entered in the Pioneer 'Book of Honour'.

A number of books and pamphlets about Morozov were published, including several edifying novels, one of them (by V. Gubarev) with what might be thought the inappropriate title of 'Son'.

In May 1934, another young hero, thirteen year old Pronya Kolibin, reported his mother for stealing grain, and received much favourable publicity.[65] Another, Pioneer Sorokin, in the North Caucasus, caught his father filling his pockets with grain, and had him arrested.[66]

In a major speech at the celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the Secret Police in December 1937, Mikoyan praised a number of named citizens who had denounced their fellows, citing with particular pride the fourteen year old Pioneer Kolya Schelgov of the village of Poryabushki in the Pugachev District, who had exposed his father I.I. Schelgov: 'The pioneer Kolya Schelgov knows what Soviet power is to him and to the whole people. When he saw that his own father was stealing socialist property, he told the NKVD'.[67]

These children may indeed deserve blame, but surely not so much as those who inculcated such conduct into them. At any rate, the mother of a boy whose son disappeared in the famine has told me that she would have preferred, and would still prefer, his dying physically to his being spiritually destroyed and transformed into what she described as

something lower than a human being, in this manner.

*

Physical elimination, straightforward killing, was indeed also a possibility. When the problem became too great for local officials *bezpeizornie* are reported shot in large numbers.[68] The decree legalizing the execution of children of twelve or over was not indeed to come into force until 7 April 1935. But this extending of all penalties down to the age of twelve may also seem to have certain implications when it comes to the Party's interpretation of Marxism. If economics determines consciousness, by the age of twelve the full class consciousness may reasonably be supposed to be established beyond eradication. However, the record of starving infants in 1933, or deporting them in 1930, certainly shows that at times of heightened 'class' struggle those a good deal younger had to take their chance. The point being perhaps, rather, that twelve years old was the limit the Party felt was overtly defensible.

Even in the comparatively tranquil circumstances of NKVD orphanages a few years later the authorities contrived to extend the age limit downwards, for example, by having doctors certify that two delinquent boys of eleven were physically older than their papers, assumed to be forged, showed.[69]

Meanwhile, we are told by a senior OGPU officer, as early as 1932 confidential orders were issued to shoot children stealing from railway cars in transit.[70] Such measures were also taken for various health reasons, as when in the Lebedyn Children's Centre seventy-six children are reported shot after getting glanders from horsemeat.[71]

It is certainly true that unwanted children were got rid of by inhumane or lethal practices, though mainly by starvation in various centres; and it is also reported, for example, that some were drowned in barges on the Dnieper, (a method also used with adults).[72] But most of the children perished from hunger. There is reasonably clear evidence of the numbers, if not the exact numbers, of the child victims.

The 'dissident' Soviet demographer M. Maksudov estimates that 'no fewer than three million children born between 1932 and 1934 died of hunger'.[73] It was above all the new-born who perished. A figure of two and a half million infants dying of starvation was given to Lev Kopelev by a Soviet researcher.[74] The 1970 Census shows 12.4 million people living who were born in 1929–31, and only 8.4 million born in 1932–4; though the natural rate of increase fell only slightly. In 1941 there were a million fewer seven year olds than eleven year olds in the schools – and this even though the eleven year old group had also suffered severely. Moreover

when we come to the famine areas, this disproportion is greater still. In Kazakhstan the seven year old group was less than two-fifths the size of the eleven year old; while in Moldavia (most of which had not formed part of the USSR in the 1930s) the seven year old group was two-thirds as large again as the eleven year old.[75]

When we turn to the few local estimates we have the picture is much the same.

In one village it was noted that 'of the young boys not one in ten survived'.[76] (Young boys are elsewhere described as the most vulnerable category of all).

In one district in the Poltava Province, of a total death roll of 7,113, the respective numbers[77] are given as:

Children (under 18)	3,549
Men	2,163
Women	1,401

A teacher in the village of Novi Sanzhary, Dnipropetrovsk Province, reports that by 1934 there were no school children left for her; another, that only two were left of a class of thirty.[78] And as to younger children, in the Ukrainian village of Kharkivtsi, the 1940–41 school year found no beginners at all, as against an average of twenty-five previously.[79]

We may reasonably conclude that of the seven million dead in the famine some three million were children, and mostly young children. (We discuss the total casualties, including adults, in Chapter 16.) But it should be noted that registration of births was not kept up accurately in the villages during the famine, for obvious reasons – though in fact few births seem to have taken place in the worst period, for equally obvious reasons: so that an unknown number of new-born babies may have died without their birth having ever been recorded.

To this figure of three million or more children dead in 1932–4, we must add the victims of dekulakization. If, as we have estimated, some three million dead are to be reckoned in this operation (not counting the adults dying later in labour camp), all accounts agree that the proportion of child deaths was very high, and all in all it can scarcely have been less than another million, again mostly the very young. To these four million odd victims of actual infanticide we should perhaps append the number of children's lives ruined or deeply scarred in the various ways we have noted: but this is beyond quantification.

Meanwhile, when it comes to the famine, measures which could have been taken at any time were finally put into effect at the end of spring 1933. Some food was released to be given to the children at school – meal,

groats, and fat. The children who had not died by the end of May generally did not die; though by now many were, of course, orphans.

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16

The Death Roll

No one was keeping count

Khrushchev

There has been no official investigation of the rural terror of 1930–33; no statement on the loss of human life has ever been issued; nor have the archives been opened to independent researchers. Nevertheless, we are in a position to make reasonably sound estimates of the numbers who died.

First, we should consider the total loss for the whole cycle of events, both in the dekulakization and in the famine. In principle this is not difficult.

We need only apply to the population given in the Soviet census of 1926, the natural growth rate of the years which followed, and compare the result we obtain with that of an actual post-1933 census.

There are a few rather minor reservations. The 1926 census, like all censuses even in far more efficient conditions, cannot be totally accurate, and Soviet and Western estimates agree that it is too low by 1.2–1.5 million,[1] (about 800,000 of it attributed to the Ukraine). This would mean an increase of almost half a million in the death roll estimates. But the convenience of an official established base figure, that of the census, is such that we shall (conservatively) ignore this in our calculations. Then again, 'natural growth rate' is variously estimated, though within a fairly narrow range. More of an obstacle, at first sight, is the fact that the next census, taken in January 1937, is unfortunately not available. The preliminary results seem to have been before the authorities on about 10 February 1937. The census was then suppressed. The Head of the Census Board, O.A. Kvitkin, was arrested on 25 March.[2] It turned out that 'the glorious Soviet intelligence headed by the Stalinist Peoples'

Commissar N.I. Yezhov' had 'crushed the serpent's nest of traitors in the apparatus of Soviet statistics'.[3] The traitors had 'set themselves the task of distorting the actual numbers of the population', or (as *Pravda* put it later) 'had exerted themselves to diminish the numbers of the population of the USSR',[4] a rather unfair taunt, since it was, of course, not they who had done the diminishing.

The motive for suppressing the census and the census-takers is reasonably clear. A figure of about 170 million had featured in official speeches and estimates for several years, a symbolic representation of Molotov's boast in January 1935 that 'the gigantic growth of population shows the living forces of Soviet construction'.[5]

Another census was taken in January 1939, the only one in the period whose results were published, but in the circumstances it has always failed to carry much conviction. All the same, it is worth noting that even if the official 1939 figures are accepted, they show a huge population deficit, if not as large as the reality.

But on the matter of the total of unnatural deaths between 1926 and 1937, the 1937 census *totals* are decisive, and these (though no other details of that census) have been referred to a few times in post-Stalin Soviet demographic publications. The most specific gives a population for the USSR of 163,772,000,[6] others, a round 164 million.[7]

The total, in the lower projections made over previous years by Soviet statisticians, and on the estimates of modern demographers, should have been about 177,300,000.

Another, rougher approach is to take the estimated population of 1 January 1930 (157,600,000)[8] and add to it Stalin's statement in 1935 that 'the annual increase in population is about three million'.[9] This too gives a figure of 178,600,000, very near our other projection. The Second Five Year Plan had also provided for a population of 180.7 million for the beginning of 1938,[10] which also implies between 177 and 178 in 1937. Oddly enough, the Head of the Central Statistical Administration in Khrushchev's time, V.N. Starovsky, attributes Gosplan's 180.7 million to 1937, comparing it with the census figure of 164 million 'even after adjustment'[11] – a phrase which implies significant upward inflation: an 'adjustment' of 5% would mean as a base figure the 156 million given to the Soviet scholar Anton Antonov-Ovseenko by a more junior official.[12] But, in accord with our practice elsewhere, we will conservatively ignore the 'adjustment'. Without it Starovsky implies a deficiency of 16.7 million. The explanation may be that the Gosplan figure, like most Gosplan figures, is for the beginning of October 1937 – in which case the deficiency would be about 14.3 million. But in this book's first edition I took a conservative interpretation (and ignored, too, even higher projections by

Soviet demographers of the period) and accepted a deficiency of no more than 13.5 million.

However, in a source not then available to me, today's leading Soviet scholar of the collectivization states the population deficit in January 1937 as 15-16 million (V.P. Danilov in *Arkheograficheski Ezhegodnik za 1968 god*, Moscow, 1970, p 249). My lower estimate at least shows that my approach was indeed 'conservative', and is testimony to a sober and unsensational approach to the facts.

This 15-16 million is not entirely death. We have to subtract those unborn because of the deaths or separation of their parents and so on. Further study of this and similar periods of population catastrophe shows that it might be as high as 26-30 percent of the total deficit. This could give c. 4.5 million, leaving us with c. 11 million actual dead in the dekulakization and the famine.

(Another approach is to note that in 1938 there were c. 19,900,000 peasant households. In 1929 it had been c. 25,900,000. At an average of 4.2 persons per peasant family, this means c. 108,700,000 peasants in 1929 and c. 83,600,000 in 1938. With 24.3 million moved to towns, this should have been c. 105 million, a deficit of c. 21 million. Allowing for date and the unborn, this gives over 13 million dead.)

Taking it as 11 million odd we must add those peasants already sentenced, but dying in labour camp after January 1937 – that is, those arrested as a result of the assault on the peasantry of 1930–33 and not surviving their sentences (but *not* including the many peasants arrested in the more general terror of 1937–8). This gives, (as we shall estimate later), not less than another 3.5 million, which would make the total peasant dead as a result of the dekulakization and famine about 14.5 million.

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We must next consider the way in which this fearful total is divided between the dekulakization and the famine. Here we are on less certain ground.

It seems to be felt in demographic circles that of the fourteen million plus odd peasant deaths due to the rural terror, the casualties fell about equally between the two causes: that is about seven million plus from dekulakization and about seven million plus in the famine. However, we can examine this proposition in more detail.

Of the 14.5 million, the 3.5 million odd dying in camps in the post-1937 period must be largely those sentenced before the decree of May 1933, though it certainly included an important component from the desperate

villages of the Ukraine and the Kuban of the famine period. These last are not, however, specifically victims of the famine itself, and to discover the death roll from starvation we must go back to the eleven million dead before 1937, and attempt to divide that figure between deportation and famine victims.

We may start with the victims of the famine: and here we begin with the deficit in the Ukrainian population. (As we have said, this does not account for the whole of the famine victims, but unofficial figures imply that about 80% of the mortality was in the Ukraine and the largely Ukrainian areas of the North Caucasus).

For the deficit of Ukrainians we must first turn to the faked 1939 census, since, as we have said, no figures by nationality – indeed nothing but the gross population result – has been published even now from the genuine 1937 census on which we have hitherto relied.

The official figure for the Soviet population in the 'census' of January 1939 was 170,467,186. Western demographic work indicates that the real numbers were probably about 167.2 million. (Even this last figure indicates a sharp recovery from 1937, in spite of an estimated two to three million dead in camps or by execution in 1937 and 1938. It appears to be explained in part by natural and in part by legal factors. Recovery in the birthrate after disaster or famine is normal; the copulation and fertility rates which have gone down drastically in them improve later. On the official side, in 1936 abortion was made illegal, and contraceptives ceased to be sold; and other measures were taken).

Of the official figure of 170,467,186 the census gives Ukrainians as 28,070,404 (as against 31,194,976 in the 1926 census). There is no way of telling how the 3.4 million inflation in the 170.5 million is distributed, and it is normally assumed that each nationality group was proportionately exaggerated (though the better concealment tactics might imply a special attempt to give the Ukrainians an extra boost, considering their poor showing).

Given no more than equal exaggeration, the true Ukrainian figure in 1939 should have been about 27,540,000. But the 31.2 million of 1926 should have risen to about 38 million in 1939. The deficit is therefore about 10.5 million. Allowing about 1.5 million for unborn children, this gives a deficit of 9 million Ukrainians up to 1939.

This does not all represent death. By 1939 heavy pressures were being put on Ukrainians outside the Ukraine to register as Russian, and a significant transfer certainly took place. A Soviet demographer grants that between the 1926 and 1939 censuses 'the low rate of growth (!) in the number of Ukrainians is explained by the lowering of the natural growth as a result of a poor harvest in the Ukraine in 1932', but adds that 'people

who formerly thought of themselves as Ukrainians, in 1939 declared themselves Russians'.[13] And we are told, for example, that people with forged documents often changed their nationality, as Ukrainians were always suspect to the police.[14]

This applied not in the Ukraine so much as among the Ukrainians elsewhere in the USSR. There were 8,536,000 of them in 1926, including 1,412,000 in the Kuban. The remnant of the Kuban Cossacks are definitely reported as being re-registered as Russian, but by now their numbers must have been very much lower than in 1926. Elsewhere it seems to have been a matter of pressure on individuals, and was doubtless a long-term process – even in the 1959 census there were over 5 million Ukrainians in the USSR outside the Ukraine. If we assume a transfer of as many as 2.5 million from the Ukrainian to the Russian listings, that leaves us with 9 minus 2.5 = 6.5 million actually dead.

Subtracting about 500,000 for the Ukrainian dead of the dekulakization of 1929–32, we are left with six million dead in the famine.

This would be divided into five million in the Ukraine and one million in the North Caucasus. The figure for non-Ukrainians may be as little as one million dead. Thus the total famine deaths would be approximately seven million, about three million of them children. As we have pointed out, these are conservative figures.

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A further clue to the numbers dying in the famine, or in its worst period, may be found in the difference between the Census Board's estimate of the population made shortly before the 1937 census, and the actual figures of that census. The prediction is 168.9 million;[15] the actuality 163,772,000 – a difference of just over five million. This is believed to be accounted for by the non-registration of deaths in the Ukraine after late October 1932 (see p.250), which meant that such figures were not at the disposal of the estimators; and in consonant with the other figures we have for deaths in the famine as a whole.

We also have a number of less direct estimates of the famine deaths, including some based on official leaks.

A Russian-born American citizen who had a pre-revolutionary acquaintance with Skrypnyk visited him in 1933, and also met other Ukrainian leaders. Skrypnyk gave him a figure of 'at least' eight million dead in the Ukraine and North Caucasus.[16] He was also told by the Ukrainian GPU chief Balitsky that eight–nine million had perished: Balitsky added that this figure had been presented to Stalin, though only as an approximation.[17] Another security officer writes that, perhaps at an

earlier stage, the GPU gave Stalin a figure of 3.3–3.5 million famine deaths.[18] A foreign Communist was given figures of ten million deaths for the USSR as a whole.[19]

Another foreign worker in a Kharkov factory, when the famine was still far from over, learnt from local officials that Petrovsky had admitted a death roll, so far, of five million.[20]

Walter Duranty told the British Embassy in September 1933 that 'the population of the North Caucasus and Lower Volga had decreased in the past year by three million, and the population of the Ukraine by four to five million', and that it seemed 'quite possible' that the total death roll was as high as ten million. It seems reasonable to suppose that Duranty's figures derive from the same source as those, also never printed, given one of his colleagues by another high official (see p. 310): or at any rate from similar official estimates circulating among authorities on the spot.

An American Communist working in Kharkov estimated a death roll of 4.5 million, from starvation alone, with millions more from the diseases of malnutrition.[21] Another American was told by a high Ukrainian official that six million had died in 1933.[22] A Ukrainian-Canadian Communist who attended the Higher Party School of the Ukrainian Central Committee was told that a secret report to this Committee gave a figure of ten million dead.[23]

As to other areas, decreases proportionally as high as the Ukraine, or nearly so, are reported in the Central Volga, Lower Volga and Don regions. The Director of the Chelyabinsk Tractor Plant, Lovin, told a foreign correspondent that more than a million had died in the Urals, Western Siberia and the Trans-Volga.[24]

These estimates, it should be noted, are not all necessarily comparable, since it is not always clear – though it sometimes is – if the total deaths in the Ukraine alone are referred to; or to what date the figures refer; or to whether deaths from famine-related diseases are included.

In any case, even the confidential official reports vary by several million. Nor need we assume that exact or even approximate figures were available (as, in fact, the report of Balitsky's estimate explicitly admits). As Leonid Plyushch says, 'party members cited a figure of five or six million . . . and others spoke of about ten million victims. The true figure probably lies in between'.[25]

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While our figure of c. eleven million premature deaths in 1926–37 remains firm, the c. seven million share of it in famine deaths is best described as reasonable or probable. If it is correct it leaves c. four million

of the deaths to dekulakization and collectivization (or those taking place before 1937).

Among this four million are included the dead of the Kazakh tragedy. Among the Kazakhs the population deficit between the 1926 and 1939 censuses (even accepting the latter's figures) was 3,968,300 minus 3,100,900: that is, 867,400. Correcting the 1939 figure by the national average (as we have done for the Ukrainians) gives us 948,000. But the 1926 population should have grown to 4,598,000 in 1939 – (on the very conservative assumption that the average USSR growth rate of 15.7% prevailed, whereas in fact other Soviet Muslim populations grew much faster). That is, the population should have been over 1.5 million higher than it was. If we allow 300,000 for unborn children and 200,000 for successful emigration from the areas closest to Sinkiang, we have a death roll of one million.

Thus we are left with three million as the 1926–37 deficit attributable to the deportation of the kulaks. We have already discussed the numbers deported, and the reported death rates. Three million is a figure which is consonant with our estimates (if 30% of deportees died, it would mean 9 million deported; if 25%, then twelve million would be the deportation total).

By 1935, in one approximate view,[26] a third of an estimated eleven million deportees were dead; a third in 'special settlement'; and a third in labour camp. Estimates of the total 1935 labour camp population run at around the five million level,[27] and up till the mass arrests of officials in 1936–8, these are always reported as 'overwhelmingly', 70–80%, peasant.[28]

Of the four million odd peasants probably in camp by 1935, most probably survived until 1937 or 1938, but thereafter the likelihood is that no more than ten percent ever saw release, and we must thus, as we have noted, probably add a minimum of another c. 3.5 million deaths to the peasant account.

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Throughout, our conclusions are based either on exact and certain figures, or on reasonably conservative assumptions. So when we conclude that no fewer than fourteen million odd peasants lost their lives as a result of the events recounted in this book we may well be understating. In any case, the eleven million odd excess dead shown by the 1937 census is hardly subject to serious amendment. The famine figures seem both reasonable in themselves and consonant with the census's shortfall; as do the dekulakization figures.

Why we cannot be more exact is obvious. As Khrushchev says in his memoirs, 'I can't give an exact figure because no one was keeping count. All we knew was that people were dying in enormous numbers'.[29]

It is significant that statistics (even if unreliable) of the mortality of cattle were published, and those of human mortality were not – so that for fifty years we have had some account of what happened to the livestock but not what happened to the human beings. In a much published speech a couple of years later Stalin was to say that more care should be taken of people, giving as an example something that supposedly happened to him in exile in Siberia: by a river-crossing with some peasants, he saw that they made every effort to save horses from being swept away, but cared little for the loss of a man, an attitude he deplored at some length. Even for Stalin, whose words seldom revealed his true attitudes, this was – and particularly at this time – a complete reversal of truth. It was he and his followers for whom human life was lowest on the scale of values.

We may now conveniently sum up the estimated death toll roughly as follows:

Peasant dead: 1930–37	11 million
Arrested in this period dying in camps later	3.5 million
TOTAL	14.5 million

Of these:

Dead as a result of dekulakization		6.5 million
Dead in the Kazakh catastrophe		1 million
Dead in the 1932–3 famine:		
in the Ukraine	5 million	
in the N. Caucasus	1 million	7 million
elsewhere	1 million	

As we have said, these are enormous figures, comparable to the deaths in the major wars of our time. And when it comes to the genocidal element, to the Ukrainian figures alone, we should remember that five million constitutes about 18.8% of the total population of the Ukraine (and about a quarter of the rural population). In World War I less than 1% of the population of the countries at war died. In one Ukrainian village of 800 inhabitants (Pysarivka in Podilia), where 150 had died, a local peasant ironically noted that only seven villagers had been killed in World War I.[30]

In the events which we have been describing the 'casualties' in a general sense, the 'walking wounded', constitute whole populations. Our concern, in this chapter, has been to establish as closely as may be possible the actual dead. But we need not for a moment forget the dreadful effects

suffered, and far into the future, by individuals and nations.

Moreover, further terrors, inflicting yet further death on much the same scale, faced the survivors.

Let us once more emphasize that the figures we have given are conservative estimates, and quite certainly do not overstate the truth. And if we cannot be more exact, it is because the Soviet regime will not let us. It is not only a matter of Stalin concealing the true facts back in the 1930s.

We owe a number of useful details to honest and courageous Soviet scholars and writers: but, even today, Moscow permits no real investigation of these monstrous events. Which is to say that to this degree the regime remains the accomplice, as well as the heir, of those who fifty years ago sent these innocent millions to their deaths.

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