

To the Editor:

Mark B. Tauger has produced (in your vol. 50, no. 1) some interesting material on the 1932 harvest which will doubtless contribute to debate on the subject among economists. But, as your readers doubtlessly noted, the acceptance or non-acceptance of his figures has virtually no bearing on one of the main points that he is arguing: whether or not Stalin used the famine as a terror weapon and whether he so used it against specific territories, notably Ukraine.

There was never any question but that Soviet agriculture was in a wretched state in 1932 and, if Tauger is right, it was even worse than previously thought. No doubt there was pervasive undernourishment amounting to actual starvation in various localities all over the USSR.

But there was a second, *and quite different*, phenomenon: in Ukraine and certain other areas, the entire crop was removed and this, rather than the general shortage, was the obvious "cause" (in Tauger's terms) of the famine there.

As to regions affected, Ukraine was not the sole sufferer. In my *The Harvest of Sorrow*, I also write—indeed as a separate chapter—on the Kuban, the Don and the Lower Volga. That Ukraine (and the then Ukrainian-speaking areas of the Kuban) was the main victim is, however, clear from the decline in the Soviet Ukrainian population from 31,194,976 in 1926 to 26,421,212 in 1937, as against an increase of the Soviet population as a whole of more than 10 percent. My very rough estimate of deaths in the famine was 5 million in Ukraine, 1 million in the Kuban and 1 million elsewhere. *Izvestiia TsK KPSS* (no. 9, 1990) gives 4 million as S. V. Kulchyts'kyi's estimate of Ukraine's famine dead; while I gather that he has in a more recent analysis arrived at a figure of 4,600,000.

There are, of course, a number of subsidiary arguments about the Ukrainian aspect of the famine. I cite a number of reports (and there are plenty more) of the blockade against food import at the Russian-Ukrainian border. There was also at the time a far more thorough purge of the Ukrainian intelligentsia than took place elsewhere. And so on.

As to the total figures, including the areas outside Ukraine, there are still difficulties and we are all still in the realm of estimates. Tauger feels that these have been exaggerated. Nevertheless a careful study in *Vestnik statistiki* (no. 7, 1990, perhaps too late for Tauger's article) by E. Andreev, L. Darskii and T. Khar'kova of the Demographic Department of N.I.I. Goskomstat gives (Table 5, p. 41) just over 8 million more deaths in 1933 than in 1934; and (Table 6, p. 43) estimates Soviet life-expectancy as 32.8 in 1932, 38.2 in 1934—and only 11.6 in 1933 (yes, I too thought this must be a misprint, but it is then divided between male and female—10.3 and 13.0 respectively)—certainly reflecting the enormous infant mortality. More generally, attention should be given to a long essay on the 1937 census by Iu. A. Poliakov, V. B. Zhiromskaia and I. N. Kiselev in *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* nos. 6, 7 and 8, 1990).

On some contributory points:

(a) Tauger's argument about the extent to which wastage of requisitioned grain lowered the Soviet food intake tells rather against than for his thesis: for grain left with the peasants would not have thus been wasted and so would have contributed to that intake.

(b) His point that grain was eventually released to the Ukrainian and neighboring peasantry proves that reserves existed which could have been released at the height of the famine and further strengthens the case that the famine was avoidable.

(c) On a minor particular in that context: the initial order to release grain dated 25 February 1933 was specifically of "seed grain," none of which (even when actually distributed) was to go to the peasantry. In fact, grain requisitioning was in part, as Postyshev put it, to recover "seed grain stolen or illegally distributed."

(d) Tauger says that the points that he doubts are urged by Ukrainian sources. Well, of course, some sources are Ukrainian, though I don't know why this should rule them out. In fact, both in detail and in general, accounts which have appeared *Slavic Review* 51, no. 1 (Spring 1992)

in (for example) Russian periodicals like *Selskaia zhizn'* fully support Ukrainian evidence. Perhaps I might add that my own analyses and descriptions of the terror-famine first appeared in the USSR in Moscow in *Russian* journals such as *Voprosy istorii* and *Novyi mir*, and that the long chapter printed in the latter was specifically about the famine in Ukraine and hence relied importantly on Ukrainian sources.

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Professor Tauger Replies:

I would like to express my appreciation for Mr. Conquest's informative response to my article. His comment, however, does not address the article's main arguments.

Those arguments were as follows. First, the 1932 Soviet grain harvest was much smaller than official figures indicated. Second, the famine's severity and geographical extent suggest that the harvest must have been small enough to cause a famine on its own, regardless of the geographical emphasis of the procurement campaign. Finally, even taking grain exports into account, the harvest faced the Soviet regime with a dilemma: it had to feed either the towns or the villages because it did not have enough grain to support both.

Mr. Conquest does not deal with these arguments. He most nearly approaches them in his assertion that in Ukraine and certain other areas "the entire crop was removed." Since the regime procured 4.7 million tons of grain from Ukraine in 1932, much less than in any previous or subsequent year in the 1930s, this would imply that the harvest in Ukraine was only on that order of magnitude or even less than my low estimate! Obviously this could not have been the case or the death toll in Ukraine would have been not four million or five million but more than twenty million because the entire rural population would have been left without grain. Even the highest famine mortality estimates for Ukraine, ten million, imply that a significant portion of the crop remained in the villages. Mr. Conquest's procurement estimates are much lower, so he must acknowledge that much more of the crop must have remained at the peasants' disposal. In this context I do not understand his contributory point regarding wastage of procured grain: the issue is not what happened to that grain but how much was harvested and how much the peasants retained.

The question of the famine's death toll, to which Mr. Conquest devotes most of his response, has no bearing on the argument insofar as it shows greater mortality in Ukraine, the North Caucasus and the Lower Volga. I acknowledged this and even provided part of the explanation for it: data showing that the 1932 harvests in those regions were much smaller than even the low average for the country as a whole. To the extent that new data show higher mortality, however (and this is a gruesome point I regret having to make), they support my argument. Since procurements were much less in 1932 than in other years, the larger mortality after them indicates that peasants had less grain left, in other words that the harvest was smaller.

I have yet to see any actual central directive ordering a blockade of Ukraine or the confiscation of food at the border. The sources available are still too incomplete to reach any conclusion about this. If large numbers of peasants starved to death in Siberia and the Middle Volga in 1931–1933, were similar restrictions, of which as yet we have no record, imposed there as well? I would not be surprised if the militia in fact confiscated food for themselves and their families and justified the confiscation by reference to a "decree"; even soldiers were short of food.

We still have very little data on food reserves and the aid that was provided during the famine, but Mr. Conquest does not use even the data available. The 25 February 1933 decree, to which he refers, was ostensibly limited to seed grain. But that does not mean that all aid, of which seed grain was only a part, was limited in the same way. As S. V. Kulchyts'kyi, whom Mr. Conquest cites, noted in his article, this 25 February decree, published later than the telegraphed order of which it was a record, included food aid. Moreover, all of this aid was in fact released at the height of the famine (see fn. 53 in my article).