

**Canada, Great Britain, and the Ukrainian Famine:
Failing to Respond to a Humanitarian Crisis, 1932-33**

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

The Ukrainian famine of 1932-33, also known as the Holodomor, is regarded by historians as one of the twentieth century's worst human catastrophes. While it took decades for the famine to receive suitably detailed analysis from historians, and with it the recognition that the famine was not an entirely natural occurrence, it has since achieved widespread recognition as a huge catastrophe for the people of the Ukraine. The famine, occurring on such a massive scale because of the deliberate action of Joseph Stalin's Soviet communist regime, which exacerbated natural hardships in the area, is still not as widely known today as other mass crimes against humanity occurring in modern history where most of the general public are concerned.

Therefore it is unsurprising that even those scholars who are familiar with the famine are still unfamiliar with the role that the international community played while millions of Ukrainians were perishing of starvation. While this deliberately inflicted starvation upon the Ukrainian people was carried out by the totalitarian Soviet communist dictatorship, some historians also ask whether Stalin's regime relied upon the Western liberal democracies to help him accomplish his end of eliciting the total submission of the Ukrainian people. Whether through awareness of what was happening in the Soviet Ukraine and remaining silent, or continuing their economic relations with the Soviets in spite of such knowledge, the political representatives and private businesses of Western nations have attracted accusations from a few scholars that they indirectly helped to ensure that Stalin's goals were accomplished without hindrance.

Ultimately, however, it was the inability to take concerted action, affected by the realities of the political and economic concerns of the day, that prevented Western nations from using the means available to them to act effectively. These means included either making an appeal to the

League of Nations or enacting a full boycott on Soviet goods (a partial boycott having been enacted early during the tenure of the Canadian government of R.B. Bennett), neither of which materialized as actions by the British or Canadians. Though the reports prepared by individuals such as Andrew Cairns relayed in detail the realities of the famine to these governments, and though their populations were informed via the efforts of journalists such as Malcolm Muggeridge and Gareth Jones, this knowledge in itself could not bring about a meaningful change in policy.

The economic partnership between the USSR and Western nations began at the start of the period of Soviet collectivization of agriculture and was already firmly established and functioning by the time that the Ukraine became the target of Stalin's aggressive agricultural policies. Canada and the United Kingdom were among the Western governments which did business with the Soviet regime in order to purchase its cheap exported grain. With time, however, these governments became more aware of the impact that the Soviet policy of collectivization was having upon the peasantry.. The trade in grain between the Soviet Union and these nations occurred both before and during the Ukrainian famine¹.

This thesis aims to explore whether or not the governments of Great Britain and Canada became aware, through the correspondence of their representatives in the Soviet Union (and through their correspondence with one another's government bureaus), that the famine in the Ukraine was the result of deliberate Soviet policy, and if so, what prevented them from taking action or raising protest using the means and methods at their disposal that would have been realistic at the time. Contemporary historians recognize that a significant portion of what is

¹Andrew J Williams. *Trading With The Bolsheviks: The Politics of East-West Trade, 1920-1939*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992, 187.

currently known about life in the Soviet Union comes from documents that Western scholars were only able to access after the fall of communism. That being said, at the time of the Ukrainian famine, there were various Western observers in the USSR whose firsthand experiences made the reality of the situation apparent even without their having access to the inner political workings and policy decisions of Stalin's Kremlin.

In seeking to provide context for why these governments failed to take action as millions of people were deliberately starved to death, despite the information on the subject being at their disposal, this thesis interrogates more deeply the events in question. In the process it will pose a series of additional questions: To what extent were the Canadian and British governments aware of the famine, and its roots in pre-meditated Soviet policies? If they were aware of it, what if anything did they do in response? If they desired to make official protest or to take some form of action against the Soviet regime, what alternatives were there available at the time that could have realistically been pursued? Was the Canadian government response at all affected by its prior history with the Ukrainian minority in Canada?

In essence, the governments of Great Britain and Canada became aware through their representatives that the famine in the Soviet Ukraine was artificially created by Stalin's regime as an act of political violence against the Ukrainian people. The Canadian government had a complicated history with Canada's Ukrainian minority, one rendered turbulent by the anxieties surrounding the presence of "enemy aliens" in Canada during the First World War and the Russian Civil War, which combined with widespread feelings of nativist hostility towards ethnic minorities meant that as late as the early 1930s some Ukrainians were regarded with suspicion by Ottawa as being potentially disloyal. However, due to R.B. Bennett's staunch anti-communism, Canada was prepared to work with Great Britain in trying to use the methods available at the

time to both nations to take punitive economic and political action in the face of Soviet human rights abuses. Unfortunately, in the end the realities of foreign trade, of the global economic climate and international relations meant these governments were unable to take meaningful action to alleviate the suffering of the Ukrainians.

To provide context to the relationship between the Ukrainians in Canada (and by extension the Ukrainian people) and the Canadian government, this thesis shall also examine how the history of Ukrainian immigrants in Canada until the early 1930s involved a high degree of intercultural conflict, hostility, bigotry and animosity directed at the Ukrainians by the English-speaking majority, resulting in the Ukrainian immigrants being the victim of official prejudices that were still recent history in 1932. Whether or not this history of tense relations affected the Canadian government's response to the protests for action of the sizeable Ukrainian community in Canada is another matter². The role of Great Britain will also be considered, given that these Ukrainians were British subjects as well as citizens of Canada, and the two governments during this period cooperated closely in making economic and political decisions that impacted the British Empire as a whole as much as its individual colonies and dominions.

The thesis will also examine the Ukrainian famine (also known as the Holodomor) itself, in order to explore the premeditated manner in which Stalin's regime went about consciously constructing a campaign of mass starvation against the Ukrainian people as a calculated act of political warfare. Then it examines how the government of Great Britain became aware of the famine and its artificial origins through their observers in the Soviet Union, and how the

²Marco Carynnyk, Lubomyr Luciuk and Bohdan S. Kordan, *The Foreign Office and the Famine*. Kingston, Ontario: The Limestone Press, 1988, 77.

Canadian government became informed. The famine was initially seized upon by anti-communist politicians such as Canadian Prime Minister R.B. Bennett) as further motivation for the countries of the British Commonwealth to enact an embargo on Soviet imports to their countries³. It shall then outline how economic realities (such as dependence on Soviet imports) resulted in the failure of their plans to punish the Soviets economically. This information shall support the argument that the British and Canadians were quite aware of the artificial nature of the Ukrainian famine, but opted not to protest to the Soviet government or cease trade relations with the USSR because of economic considerations.

The early history of the Ukrainians in Canada provides a window into how public opinion (specifically the opinion of the English-speaking majority) regarded the Ukrainians, the origins of the widespread hostility and prejudice against them, and how the events that befell them during the first few decades of their history in Canada was affected by a combination of the unfolding of events in international and domestic politics and by the actions of a few outspoken members of the Ukrainian-Canadian community.

The established historiography on the background of the Holodomor itself and its origins in the deliberate policy of the Soviet state (and the machinations of Joseph Stalin) demonstrate how, besides being a humanitarian crisis, the Ukrainian famine was an artificially created crisis, one which stood to be affected significantly by the action or inaction of external forces.⁴. Furthermore, the existing historiography also provides insight into how Canadian and British politicians viewed the famine. Primary sources shed new light into their decision making

³Williams, 187.

⁴Wsevolod I. Isajiw, *Famine-Genocide in Ukraine, 1932-1933: Western Archives, Testimonies And New Research*. Toronto, Ontario: Ukrainian Canadian Research and Documentation Centre, 2003, 52.

processes, while secondary sources reveal how these decisions were affected by the ideological viewpoints of the politicians and their pragmatic considerations of the economic and political realities.

Primary sources, ranging from British and Canadian government documents to newspaper articles from major contemporary publications such as the *Globe* provide further insight into why the events in question took the course they did, incorporating information that which most secondary historians have not yet incorporated into their own research. These sources will range from contemporary newspapers, magazines, books and pamphlets from various countries to dossiers of information compiled by governments in order to brief politicians and civil servants, providing insight into the thoughts and activities of these governments and the current affairs that affected their decisions.

Historians seldom touch upon Canadian trade with the Soviet Union during the first twenty years of the Soviet regime, or on the role of Canada under the leadership of R.B. Bennett in trying to assist the British Empire in reconciling ideological opposition to Soviet communism with the economic realities of international trade during the Great Depression. The Canadian government's awareness of the famine is in itself a rarely discussed topic, let alone that this burgeoning awareness occurred at the same time that Bennett was urging the entire British Empire to boycott Soviet goods in an effort to crush international communism. While Bennett's domestic anti-communism is a well-known aspect of his policies while in office, that it also materialized itself as a campaign to try and strangle the USSR economically is far from well known, let alone the eventual faltering of his campaign⁵. While all of these elements have been

⁵Lorne Brown, *When Freedom was Lost: The Unemployed, the Agitator, and the State*. Montreal: Black Rose, 1987, 42.

touched upon in individual secondary sources, no scholar has brought them into dialogue to furnish a broader narrative involving British imperial economic relations with the Soviet Union during this period.

There is another factor that must be taken into account. A significant portion of the historiography created regarding the early history of Ukrainians in Canada, the Ukrainian-Canadian internment between 1914 and 1921, and Ukrainian-Canadian history in the interwar period, has been chronicled by Ukrainian-Canadian historians. Their work has often been published by organizations devoted to the preservation of Ukrainian-Canadian history and to the commemoration of such events as their wartime internment. There is a distinct danger that the historical narrative they present may be one that emphasizes Ukrainian historical victimhood at the hands of the English-speaking Canadian majority, in an effort to obtain compensation for what they regard as past wrongdoings against their people. Whatever wrongdoing may have occurred, as vital as these historians' work may be to exploring the subject, effort shall be made whenever possible to avoid the simple repetition of the narrative presented in their books, and to temper it with additional information that will hopefully present the subject in a more complex light.

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Chapter 1.

Opposition To Early Ukrainian Settlement In Canada and Wartime Internment: 1891-1930

To understand why the governments of Canada and Great Britain responded as they did to the Ukrainian famine one must understand the history up to that point in time of the relationship between the British Empire, its colony of Canada, and the Ukrainian people, specifically the immigrants who came to settle in Canada beginning in the final decade of the nineteenth century. Their arrival was encouraged by some sections of Canadian society, and their immigration had originally been assisted and orchestrated by the Canadian government in a bid to further the settlement of the West. During this period, the Ukrainians managed to build thriving and distinct communities. However, many Ukrainians experienced widespread discrimination from the English-speaking majority, the most extreme manifestation of which was represented by the internment of thousands of Ukrainian-Canadians as “enemy aliens” during the First World War. When examining the Ukrainian-Canadian response to the Holodomor, and the apparent difficulty that they had in getting the government to heed their direct calls for action to save the Ukrainians from starvation at Stalin’s hands, their acrimonious interactions with Canadian society leading up to the 1930s becomes an important factor.

One of the most regrettable aspects of modern Canadian history which the public has been forced to confront within the last twenty-five years is the internment during both world wars of ethnic groups deemed to be security threats because of their ties to countries with which Canada was then at war. The internment of Japanese Canadians (and to a lesser extent the internment of Italian Canadians) during the Second World War have elicited much political and

scholarly attention since the late 1980s.⁶ Numerous books have been written, significant guilt and national soul-searching have been provoked by the accounts of those subjected to the experience of internment, and debates have wracked Parliament about the question of material compensation for those victims of internment who suffered loss of liberty and property as a result of their ordeal⁷.

And yet, for all the stigma and the overall poisonous legacy of wartime internment in Canada, for all the recognition of the ways in which the insecurities and draconian realities of wartime were worsened by ethnically based prejudice, the Ukrainian-Canadian internment of the First World War does not enter public discourse with the same frequency as the Japanese-Canadian internment of the Second World War. That being said, in Canada the majority of the historiography chronicling the history of the Ukrainian internment and its background has been produced by historians of Ukrainian descent, and their work has been published on behalf of organizations dedicated to the creation of public awareness about the internment and the preservation of the memories of the Ukrainian experience. As factually true as their content may be and as essential as their work is to understanding the period, there is a danger that the historians' conclusions may be distorted by a need to present the entirety of the history of early Ukrainian settlement in Canada as being exclusively one of persecution and victimhood. While the prejudices that did exist are vital to understand in relation to the internment of the Ukrainians, one must not assume that all Ukrainians in Canada received nothing but derision and

⁶ Ken Adachi. *The Enemy That Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians*. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977); Franca Iavocetta, *Enemies Within: Italian and Other Internees in Canada and Abroad*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000, 379.

⁷Kevin James, *Seeking Specificity in the Universal: A Memorial for the Japanese Canadians Interned During the Second World War*. Halifax, Dalhousie University, 2008, 2.

scorn from the majority, nor that their internment was the inevitable and predestined culmination of the prejudice that did exist.

Upon the outbreak of the First World War in Canada, the process was set in motion of rounding up large numbers of immigrants and foreign nationals (recent or otherwise) from the Allied camp's block of enemy nations, the Central Powers. Select individuals whose countries of origin were Germany, the lands of the Ottoman Empire, and the myriad nations and ethnicities subject to the empire of Austria-Hungary were imprisoned in the first large scale internment operation in Canadian history. Of all the ethnicities to be targeted by the Canadian government as potential spies or traitors employed by Canada's enemies, the group that Canadian officialdom targeted with special energy was the Ukrainian-Canadians. While the Ukraine itself was a province of the Russian Empire, a member of the Allied nations, a substantial portion of the territory that now makes up the modern Ukrainian state was at that time under Austro-Hungarian Hapsburg rule.

Under the provisions of the War Measures Act, the Canadian government decided to err on the side of caution and treat virtually all Ukrainians in Canada as hostile, potentially dangerous "enemy aliens." In the case of the Ukrainians, the Canadian government came down harder upon them and interned them in larger numbers than that of any other group of "enemy aliens" in Canada on the basis of prejudices against them that existed in everything from day-to-day interactions through to the highest levels of officialdom. This reality stemmed back to the beginnings of mass Ukrainian settlement, primarily in the Western prairies, beginning in the 1890s. While the number of Ukrainians interned were by no means the entirety of the Ukrainians

in Canada, , and not all internees were subject to mistreatment, the prejudices against them still had far-reaching effects for the Ukrainian community in Canada as a whole⁸.

Ukrainian mass immigration to Canada originally began with the blessing of the Canadian government. The first seeds were sown in September of 1891 when two Ukrainians, Wasyl Eleniak and Ivan Pillipiw, left the village of Nebyliv in Galicia, a region encompassing the Ukrainian and Polish territories that were under the rule of the multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian Empire. They became the first documented Ukrainian immigrants to Canada when they started homesteading in Alberta. Their discovery that a 160 acre homestead could be purchased for a mere \$10.00 (an astonishing bargain even in the currency of the time) was published in a wildly popular pamphlet entitled “About The Free Lands” written by an esteemed agricultural professor from Lviv named Joseph Oleskiw⁹. Oleskiw had taken it upon himself to investigate suitable foreign territories for Ukrainian emigrants, after Ukrainian attempts to settle in Brazil and Argentina had failed horribly due to the settlers’ inability to deal with the climate, the tropical diseases, and the hard contract labour.

In 1895 Oleskiw visited Canada to persuade the government of the benefits of accepting large scale Ukrainian settlement on the Western prairies, arguing that as a primarily agricultural people they would be ideally suited to cultivating the harvests of the land. Ukrainians living under both the empires of Austria-Hungary and Tsarist Russia (the latter of which had the bulk of the Ukrainian population living within its borders) were taken with the prospect of settlement in Canada after reading Oleskiw’s laudatory pamphlet. Ukrainians subject to both empires

⁸The subject of Ukrainian-Canadian internment has principally been handled by Ukrainian-Canadian historians such as Orest T. Martynowych and Lubomyr Luciuk, whose work will be discussed at length later and has outlined the multi-faceted nature of the Ukrainian experience during the First World War in considerable detail.

⁹Orest T. Martynowych, *Ukrainians in Canada*. Edmonton, University of Alberta, 1991, 60.

endured rather meagre existences, working in what was tantamount to serfdom for foreign landowners, and under the rule of autocratic monarchies¹⁰. Oleskiw's proposal of mass Ukrainian resettlement was initially well received with the election of Wilfrid Laurier to the office of Prime Minister in 1896. Nonetheless, the Ukrainian plan had been far from the Canadian government's first choice where settling the prairies was concerned.

Clifford Sifton, the Minister of the Interior in charge of Laurier's immigration policy, believed that farmers were the ideal settlers for the fertile prairies, but new settlers were only sought after the government had failed to procure the settlers from its choice targets: Britain, Northern Europe and the United States. Thus, Sifton felt obligated to begin orienting the activities of the government's immigration branch towards south-eastern Europe¹¹.

By 1914. An estimated 17,000 Ukrainians had settled in Canada¹². The largely agrarian nature of their lifestyle was not far removed from the semi-feudal peasant lifestyle common in the Russian Empire and Austria-Hungary that they had left behind. The first Ukrainian settlers in Canada formed block settlements in the parkland belt of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The area is perhaps comparable to the Ukrainian steppes in terms of its geography. Other settlers from Galicia and Bukovina left a country of semi-wooded areas in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains, and gravitated to the aspen parklands of the Prairie Provinces. Many Ukrainians in Canada specifically demanded the privilege of taking these wooded territories in order to have a steady supply of firewood and building lumber. The resemblance of these lands to their home

¹⁰O.W. Gerus and J.E. Rea, *The Ukrainians in Canada*. Ottawa, Canadian Historical Association, 1985, 5

¹¹Gerus and Rea, 5.

¹²Wsevolod Isajiw and Andrij Makuch, *Ukraine and Ukrainians Throughout The World*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1994, 333.

country gave further support to the idea that they would be ideal to cultivate it agriculturally. By 1914, their communities had expanded to include enclaves in Eastern Canadian cities such as Toronto, Montreal, Hamilton and Windsor¹³. Whether on the prairies, the woodlands or the urban centers, the Ukrainians placed great value upon remaining close to family members, people from the same villages in the old country, and generally those with whom they held cultural and linguistic links. The enclaves they constructed for themselves were thus distinct from the rest of Canadian society, and the process of relative assimilation was still in its early stages. It was this distinctiveness that would later provoke the hostility of some in English Canada.

Historians such as Jaroslav Petryshyn have provided great insight into the prejudice that many contemporary commentators had towards the Ukrainians during the early years of their settlement in Canada. However, his works and those of other historians that have sought to explore the negative aspects of the Ukrainian-Canadian experience in this period have downplayed the fact that the response of the English-speaking majority to the Ukrainians was not one of universal hostility. Many regarded Ukrainian immigration as beneficial and essential to the development of the Canadian west.

In an article of December 2, 1897, the Toronto *Globe* praised Clifford Sifton's efforts to establish at Yorkton in Saskatchewan a colony of "Galicians." (The term "Galician" tended to be used to describe Ukrainians in Canada irrespective of whether they were Austro-Hungarian or Russian subjects, though others came from other Hapsburg territories in the region known as Bukovina between Russian Ukraine and Romania .) It praised these efforts, alongside Sifton's

¹³Wsevolod Isajiw and Andrij Makuch, 346.

actions to maintain order in the Yukon during the gold rush, as part of the overall plan to render sparsely populated regions across the nation suitable to receive increased quantities of settlers, and allowing existing settlers to thrive in the process. “Care for the proper establishment of immigrants already here is a feature of our immigration policy to which he [Sifton] is devoting special attention, and his efforts promise substantial results,” the author wrote. “The Galicians have all built comfortable houses, and the majority of them are fully prepared for the winter.....An effort will be made to find work for them in the neighbourhood until their farming operations afford a steady means of livelihood¹⁴.”

Another *Globe* article from May 12 1899 defended the ‘Galicians’ as vital to the civilization of the prairies, urging on the construction of schools, roads, churches, railways, the foundation of newspapers and bearing the burden of taxation simply by virtue of the increase of their population. The author asserted that by virtue of immigrating out west they were lessening the burden placed upon the increasingly congested cities, and asserted “The general testimony is that they are vigorous in physique, cleanly in their habits, kindly and religious in the best and broadest and sense of the term.” The author even pre-empted nativist arguments that only settlers of British stock were industrious enough to cultivate the land by pointing out;

“In all the discussions on immigration it is taken for granted that anybody who comes from the British islands, at least from the peasant class, is a desirable acquisition; and yet we hear accounts of agricultural labourers there living lives of great poverty, squalor and ignorance. The very object of migration is improvement; if the man is well off at home there is no object in inducing him to break all his home ties and try his chances in a new country. The people who stand to gain by a change are the poor and discontented; the argument for migration is that their poverty is not due to their own fault but to the narrowness of their opportunities, and that they will thrive under more congenial surroundings¹⁵.”

¹⁴“The Minister of the Interior”, *The Globe and Mail*, December 2 1897.

¹⁵“Foreign Immigration”, *The Globe*, May 12 1899.

A surprising number of these editorials came from the *Globe* and other newspapers which also ran numerous articles viciously attacking the Ukrainians, striving to refute the rhetoric directed against them. A *Globe* editorial of August 22, 1899, confronted directly the frequent assertion by anti-Ukrainian commentators that criminal or undesirable behaviour by some was automatically representative of the whole, and defending the notion that the practical value of immigration trumped inter-cultural disputes;

“When people like the Doukhobors or Galicians, whose dress, speech and customs are unfamiliar, come in large numbers to this country, a certain amount of prejudice is to be expected. Our first impression is apt to be that ways which are not our ways must be wrong or ridiculous. A murder is committed by a Galician, and we are to told that the Galicians are a murderous race, as if the crime were a novelty introduced to Canada by these people..... We confess that the race or religion of the new-comers is a matter that gives us very little anxiety. Are they likely to be good farmers, good neighbours, good citizens is, it appears to us, the main question for the people of this country¹⁶.”

A September 4 1899 article from the *Globe* also pointed out the hypocrisy of Conservative complaints to the Liberal government against the Ukrainians, reminding the readers that the program to admit Ukrainian settlers had originally been initiated by the previous Tory government¹⁷. Another from September 9 cited the Ukrainians as one of the ethnic groups targeted by nativists fearful of immigration, and ridiculed them for their reflexive fears of these groups as expressed by another prominent newspaper; “The Montreal Star is in a condition verging on hysteria occasioned by the fear that Canada will be swamped by Chinese, Japanese, Doukhobors, Galicians and other “furriners.” Unless something is done quickly, civilization will be a failure, and the Caucasian played out. Mr. Hugh Macdonald seems to be touched with a similar complaint, and is talking about the superstition, illiteracy and what not of the new comers. All this seems to us to indicate a defective faith in ourselves and civilization¹⁸.” If there

¹⁶“Immigration Questions”, *The Globe*, August 22 1899.

¹⁷“The Galician Immigrants”, *The Globe*, September 4 1899.

¹⁸“The Know-Nothing Campaign”, *The Globe*, September 9 1899.

was legitimate concern that groups such as the Ukrainians were largely illiterate, the author went on, the practical solution was to invest more money in educational infrastructure.

A *Globe* article from November 21 1899 commented on the Manitoba provincial election by reminding its readers that immigrants to the prairies were the foundation of the future of the community, with the implication being that it was essential to integrate new immigrants into the provincial schooling system for them to be effectively assimilated; “Make no mere negative discrimination against the French-Canadian, the Doukhobor, the Galician; but bear in mind, of course, the greater need of the newcomer for instruction in our institutions. The rising generation must be considered as well as the electors of to-day, and from this point of view the determination of the Manitoba Government to maintain and increase the efficiency of the Manitoba schools is of the utmost importance¹⁹.”

Another *Globe* article from May 11 1900 also served as a direct contrast to the fiercely disparaging rhetoric other editorial writers reserved for the Ukrainians, including frequent accusations that they refused or were incapable of assimilation; “They are adapting themselves to the condition of the country and acquiring the same habits and modes of life as the settlers of British blood. They have shown eagerness and special aptitude in acquiring the English language, and have made great progress towards assimilation. . . . It is a marked characteristic of the Galician that he is anxious to become a Canadian in every sense.” As optimistic as this article might have been, it shall become clear that the author’s other declaration was not a universal one, namely “This rapid change accounts for the disappearance of the prejudice against them at one time common among English-speaking settlers²⁰.”

¹⁹“The Manitoba Elections”, *The Globe*, November 21 1899.

²⁰“Growing Time in the West”, *The Globe*, May 11 1900.

Admittedly those who would praise the Ukrainians had to frequently defend them against those who opposed their ongoing settlement of the West. On December 17 1901 the *Globe* reported the statement issued by the Liberal opposition to the Conservative provincial government of Manitoba, which at the time was attempting to take measures to exclude further Ukrainian immigrants from the province as well as eliminating the possibility of them eventually gaining the franchise, which they did not yet possess; “The soil of the prairies will yield up its wealth to the Doukhobor or the Galician just as well as to one of our own race, and all that is necessary is to see that the new-comers shall be law-abiding people, and that they shall have a fair knowledge of our institutions before voting²¹.”

Even on the eve of the First World War, many still enthusiastically welcomed the prospect of further Ukrainian immigration. A *Globe* article from May 25 1914 bemoans the fact that the flow of Ukrainian immigrants had apparently been cut off by the European tensions that just a few months later were to erupt in the continent and plunge the world into war. The article, entitled “Colonists Canada’s Greatest Need”, assumes a disappointed tone when mentioning “Austria has recently, for the safeguarding of her national defence, cut off the supply of young Galicians who were among our most promising colonists, and who settled on the land in considerable numbers²².” These commentators were unified by their conviction that the accommodation of Ukrainian settlers would bring material benefit to the nation as a whole in a utilitarian sense.

It was not long after mass immigration began to take off in 1896 that the English-speaking majority began to react harshly towards the prospect of widespread Ukrainian

²¹“Liberals in Opposition”, *The Globe*, December 17 1901.

²²“Colonists Canada’s Greatest Need”, *The Globe*, May 25 1914.

settlement. Sifton was attacked in newspaper editorials, such as one condemning his plan to settle Western Canadas with “herds of half-civilized Galicians.” (The term “Galician” tended to be used to describe Ukrainians in Canada irrespective of whether they were Austro-Hungarian or Russian subjects, though others came from other Hapsburg territories in the region known as Bukovina between Russian Ukraine and Romania²³.) In spite of the Ukrainians being a European people, and the widely prevalent ideology of “scientific” racism and social Darwinism maintaining that it was the peoples of Europe who represented the highest order of humanity, those among the ranks of the English speaking majority who adhered to this concept still looked down on the Ukrainians.

In an era when British dominions zealously promoted the ideology of British imperialism, there were many in Anglo-Canadian society who maintained a doctrine of Anglo-Saxon superiority. At the turn of the century it was common for Canadian commentators to assert that the purpose of the colonization and settlement of the Western prairies was so that such territories as Manitoba would be “reborn in the image of Ontario,” thus paving the way “to advance that Anglo-Saxon civilization which seems destined to dominate the world.” This destiny would be assured, or so said these same commentators, because “It is a people’s duty to set their face toward a high ideal of national life, to conserve such elements as are in harmony with this ideal, and to eliminate whatever is opposed to it. The higher civilization has a moral right to displace the lower²⁴”

Jaroslav Petryshyn’s *Peasants in the Promised Land* provides detailed insight into how the Ukrainians were perceived by some media commentators from members of the English

²³Gerus and Rea, 5.

²⁴J.R. Conn, “Immigration”, *Queen’s Quarterly* 8, No. 2, 1900-01, 119.

Canadian majority, drawing heavily on newspaper editorials produced during the first thirty years of the Ukrainian-Canadian experience. These publications certainly did not represent the sole indicator of public opinion. However, they were still the most effective method to express public opinion in the age of industrialized mass communication. The authors of the editorials did maintain some sway over said opinion, and certain viewpoints became more important to consider the more frequently they were repeated by a variety of sources. Many of these editorials in what were major newspapers at the time displayed hostile attitudes towards new immigrants, albeit expressed in semi-respectable language. Admittedly, Petryshyn's book does present a skewed picture of how the Ukrainians were perceived by focusing overwhelmingly on presenting examples of negative comments directed against them. Despite this selective historiography, the examples demonstrate well the counterpoints to the pro-Ukrainian rhetoric we have already seen presented thus far.

It was easy for nationalism and jingoism of an overwhelmingly pro-British kind (and the bigoted race and ethnicity-based prejudices associated with it) to receive free and frequent expression in this venue. Petryshyn reveals the widespread nature of these prejudices in respectable mainstream newspapers. While not all of Canadian society bought into a patriotically British, homogenously Anglo-Saxon, fiercely nativist and exclusionist nationalist philosophy displayed by such editorials, and by no means did the views of newspaper readers uniformly mirror those of the writers, such opinions could be expressed via public channels commonly enough to be considered normal.

If Anglo-Saxon peoples were declared (by themselves, of course) to represent the pinnacle of human development and by extension the ideal settlers of Canada's soil, the peoples of Eastern and Southern Europe were seen by the most exclusionary Canadian nativists as a

lower form of humanity. Because of their strange and foreign language and cultural practices, the Ukrainians represented a direct threat to the wholly homogeneous vision of Canadian society so lusted after by the proponents of a British imperialist vision. It was prophetic that the loyalty of the new Ukrainian arrivals would be called into question long before anyone could have conceived that Canada might one day be at war with the European empire from which they had originally come. Some commentators of the era seemed to imply that admitting more immigrants into Canada would exacerbate the divisions in national unity that already existed as a result of the discontents of French Canadians, possibly threatening Canadian sovereignty and the young nation's ability to resist the relentless policy of "Manifest Destiny" of a zealously expansionist United States. The editorials from the period that Petryshyn quotes extensively illustrated these sentiments. The journalist Archibald Hurd commented on Anglo-Canadian anxieties regarding the influx of immigrants of various nationalities in the 1890s wrote;

The newcomers from America and Europe may make good enough Canadians, but will they become loyal subjects of the British Empire? The two terms are not synonymous...Will not the present feeble separatist movement gather strength when the time is ripe, when the Dominion has increased in prosperity, and the population has been further swollen by foreign peoples, and particularly Americans, are never weary of pointing to the progress of the United States as an independent power²⁵.

While Hurd may have been apprehensive about new immigrants in general, other commentators were particularly inflamed by the presence of such groups as the Ukrainians whose ethnic separation from the Anglo-Saxon majority constituted an especially grave threat to their racialized world view. Victoria Member of Parliament E.G. Prior asserted in the House of Commons in 1899 that "the aim should be to people Canada with those who have the courage and the wish to build up the British Empire and perpetuate British institutions." In a speech to the

²⁵E.G. Prior, House of Commons Speech, *Commons Debates*, 1899, quoted in Jaroslav Petryshyn. *Peasants in the Promised Land*. Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1985, 96.

House of Commons, Prior declared that despite having never met a Galician before, he had concluded that “We have nothing in common with them, They cannot assimilate with us in any way.....Are such people likely to make good citizens and contribute to building up the British Empire?²⁶”. It became apparent that some of Prior’s contemporary commentators took this to mean non-English-speaking peoples could not possibly accomplish this task. Public figures such as Prior could be adamant in these beliefs in spite of comments (like those we have seen previously) declaring that the Ukrainians were eager to assimilate and contribute to the nation’s growth and development with their labour.

The mere difference of geographic origins between Ukrainians and Britons within the same continent seemed a suitable justification to create a chasm between the two peoples in which the Ukrainians were a thoroughly racialized “other.” Some journalists commonly referred to Galicians as “dirty” and Bukovynians as “backward.” They were frequently represented as utterly devoid of redeeming qualities as an ethnicity, with any qualities of merit being subscribed to British peoples alone. Thus a substantial portion of the prejudice against them could be divided into three main categories: fear that their lacking the English language would create national disunity by disrupting Anglo-Saxon homogeneity, scientific racism that deemed them inferior at the biological level, and dismissal of and contempt for their cultural practices and heritage²⁷.

Clive Philips Wolley writing for the *Ottawa Anglo-Saxon* on June 9, 1899, effectively labelled the Ukrainians as subhumans, implying that their very contact with British peoples was to the former a physically debasing experience for Anglo-Saxon genetic purity. Wolley was a

²⁶Petryshyn, 96.

²⁷Petryshyn, 97.

staunch British imperialist and vocal racist who also expressed virulently bigoted views of the Chinese (in a manner which was sadly not uncharacteristic of the times.) He also held favourable opinions of the Russian Empire (speaking in favour of food relief to Russia during the country's 1892 famine) that might have increased his contempt of the Ukrainians, treated as they were like a conquered people by the Russians²⁸. The newspaper for which he was writing could be construed from its title to be of an especially jingoistic nature. While such publications had limited appeal and circulation, the ideas they espoused could unfortunately be disseminated anywhere. Wolley even directly compared the Ukrainians to animals. His condemnation of ethnic groups who were predominantly Nordic or Teutonic in origin, such as Fins and Mennonites, alongside the eastern European ethnic groups, demonstrated how simply originating from beyond the British Isles could make immigrants the objects of extreme prejudice in the eyes of some commentators. In essence he argued that the Ukrainians were among the groups who must be regarded as different, inferior races whose mixing with Anglo Canadians would only taint their bloodline:

It is not too much to affirm that in the Anglo-Saxon type, man has reached to the highest point of excellence to which he has hitherto attained and whilst it is our duty to do what we can to bring mankind as a whole up to our level, it is at least fair to ask whether it is wise to spoil THE BEST by reckless admixture of the SCUM. The dogs may pick up the crumbs which fall from the children's table, but there is no reason why they should be asked to sit at that table, mix blood with and share the heritage of the children. And that is just what is being done to-day. Into Manitoba and the Northwest Territories we are pouring Mennonites, Doukhobors, Galicians, Finns and heaven knows what besides. Why? They are not of our race²⁹.

²⁸*ABC Bookworld*, "PHILLIPPS-WOLLEY, Clive (1854-1918)", http://www.abcbookworld.com/view_author.php?id=5603

²⁹Clyde Phillips Wolley, *Ottawa Anglo-Saxon*, June 9 1899.

Such commentators maintained that the Ukrainians were to be regarded as a separate and inferior species of humanity. The most generous assessments of the Ukrainians in Canada regarded them as beneficial in small numbers and for a presumably limited time in the country, but balked at the idea of mass Ukrainian settlement. The *Daily Evening Review* of Peterborough, Ontario, did not doubt their industrious work ethic but doubted that they could be transformed into “good Britishers when imported en bloc³⁰.” Others wrote off the Ukrainians as a pariah from the very beginning, their tainted opinions of them informed by racist preconceptions. The threat posed by “Galician and other foreigners” was invoked by the Montreal *Daily Star* in an issue of May 6, 1899, which denounced Ukrainians as “opposed to British customs, lazy and vicious³¹.” According to proponents of Anglo-Saxon racial supremacy, the difference in ethnicity between themselves and Southeastern European Slavs was vast, never mind their additional phobia of the Ukrainian language and culture. While the broad prejudice of these editorials was likely increased by the ignorance of their writers regarding the Ukrainians (due to their not being from prairie provinces or likely having never seen a Ukrainian), they demonstrated that such prejudices could easily take hold in various places across the nation regardless of geographic location.

While hatred and vitriol directed against the Ukrainians was already heavily informed by racial and ethnic chauvinism, there were other factors to the English-speaking majority’s anxiety at the Ukrainian influx. By the late nineteenth century, a widespread source of insecurity for Canadians was the increasing number of Canadian citizens opting to settle in the United States. This was an issue of national concern in the 1890s when Ukrainian immigration began in earnest. Politicians

³⁰*Peterborough Daily Evening Review*, April 5 1899, cited in Petryshyn, 96

³¹*Montreal Daily Star*, May 6 1899, cited in Petryshyn, 97..

attributed the problem to an excess of highly educated members of the professional classes, who outstripped farmers in numbers and were seeking opportunities in America that they felt Canada could not give them, resulting in a mass exodus of the “cream” of Canadian society.

Consequently the idea of the West being settled by Ukrainians, already despised for their ethnic and cultural differences, when inadequate numbers of Canadian farmers could be persuaded to take up the task enraged various mouthpieces of nationalistic sentiment. The *Edmonton Bulletin* commented on the matter. Though it was a Tory-friendly newspaper it quickly seized the opportunity to attack Sifton (a Liberal) in a fierce display of partisanship, the anti-Ukrainian sentiments it espoused echoed those of various other commentators. This occurred in spite of the pro-Ukrainian editorials the newspaper also ran on occasion. The editorial declared

Far better is it for Manitoba to be filled up with Canadians from Ontario or with ex-Canadians from Dakota, than with the miserable Galicians Mr. Sifton seems determined to pour into that portion of our fair domain. Let us think of the Welfare of the Dominion as a whole³².....

In a similarly disparaging tone, the *Peterborough Morning Times* remarked:

Why go across the water to get the offscourings of the world, to Galicia, or some other point, and pick on the remnants of humanity, which have got to be made into people³³.

The implication to this statement (influenced as it was by partisan rivalry) seems to have been that the Ukrainians as they currently existed as a cultural entity were so backwards that their cultural heritage alone was sufficient to exclude them from society, but that the task that British imperialists faced in building them up by introducing them to superior British culture was too great an undertaking for anyone to be bothered with. In 1893 the *Quebec Mercury* denounced Galicians as “being bestial in their habits, dirty and unkempt, poor in pocket and criminal in their antecedents³⁴.” In 1899, newspapers in Brandon, Manitoba, referred to the Ukrainians as

³²*Edmonton Bulletin*, April 10 1899, cited in Petryshyn, 97.

³³ *Peterborough Morning Times*, March 21 1899, cited in Petryshyn, 97.

³⁴ *Quebec Mercury*, March 22 1899, cited in Petryshyn, 97.

“pampered paupers,” “foreign scum” and “barbarians³⁵.” Manitoba Premier Hugh John Macdonald referred to Galicians in an anti-immigrant editorial as a “mongrel” race³⁶. While the difference in their language and their ethnic background had provided sufficient ammunition for bigots opposed to Ukrainian settlement in principle, others quickly seized upon the visible cultural differences evident in the practices of the Ukrainians once they arrived.

Even their staunchest supporter and the architect of Western settlement, Clifford Sifton, admitted that “of course there are some things in connection with their social habits which are more or less distasteful to Canadians.” (This was, admittedly, part of a speech to the House of Commons in which he asserted that they nonetheless possessed an industrious character that made them ideal for assimilation in spite of the initial culture shock³⁷.) The fact that the Ukrainians were by and large peasants, used to living simple agrarian lives which in their nature had changed little over the course of centuries in the near feudal social order of the empires under which they had lived in Europe, served as a source of contempt for Canadians who contradictorily praised the act of farming while condemning the lifestyle and behaviour of farmers. The low state in which the Ukrainians had lived in Europe was a significant motivator for emigration, but in Canada it fed into a prevailing sentiment of contempt for the lower classes by the upper classes.

Another editorial, speaking about the phenomenon of mass immigration in general but with the Ukrainians no doubt specifically in mind, suggested that when “a large number of people are content to live in squalor and ignorance, they tend to lower the standard of the whole

³⁵Petryshyn, 97.

³⁶*Manitoba Free Press*, June 22 1899, cited in Luciuk and Hryniuk, 289.

³⁷Clifford Sifton, House of Commons Speech, *Commons Debates*, 1899, 8507, cited in Petryshyn, 99.

population³⁸.” Ukrainian dress and behaviour made them visible minorities in a country the mere fact of their ethnic and culture differences had provided the prejudiced with an excuse to regard them with hostility. The editor of the *Belleville Intelligencer* wrote on March 18, 1899 that “the Galicians, they of the sheepskin coats, the filth and the vermin, do not make splendid material for the building of a great nation. One look at the disgusting creatures as they pass through over the C.P.R. on their way west has caused many to marvel that beings bearing the human form could have sunk to such a bestial level³⁹.”

Often their few defenders patronizingly put the sole justification for their existence as being beasts of burden. “They are physically strong, I believe, but is that all that is expected of them...?,” one journalist wrote. “As for physical strength we know that some of the lowest types of humanity are physically strong⁴⁰”. To the *Edmonton Bulletin* in 1897, their mere appearance suggested inherent barbarism, obvious criminality, and indeed a total lack of humanity, writing “If only Clifford Sifton could see a photograph of a newly arrived Ukrainian ‘in all the glory of’ its ultra negligee attire as it parades through our streets, he would have a violent and nauseating feeling in the region of his watch pocket⁴¹”.

To compound this prejudice, the rush of Ukrainians to Western Canada resulted in a high density of close-knit, wholly Ukrainian communities. Ukrainians naturally settled with one another owing to the commonality of language and culture, thus alienating them from the English-speaking majority. The insularity of their communities provided further ammunition for the English Canadians to attack them. Visibly separated from mainstream society, their status as

³⁸*Edmonton Bulletin*, June 8 1899, cited in Petryshyn, 99.

³⁹*Belleville Intelligencer*, March 18 1899, cited in Petryshyn, 100.

⁴⁰Joseph Amedee Boudreau, *The Enemy Alien Problem in Canada*. Anne Arbour, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1965, 21.

⁴¹Petryshyn, 99.

“others” and outsiders was further cemented, their separation from the majority only serving to cultivate suspicion and exacerbate hatred against them. The self-contained communities, created by their inability to speak English and their desire to preserve the ways of their native land, highlighted their separation from the rest of Canadian society, feeding assertions that non-English immigrants would splinter Canadian society and national identity through their stubborn insistence on forming their own ethnic enclaves.

The self-insulation was only compounded by the determination of other Western settlers to avoid them, partially because of the aforementioned prejudices that characterized their very existence as anathema, and partially from fears that their self-contained communities might expand dramatically and claim an excess of land. The *Halifax Herald* concluded that “their presence in our Northwest tends strongly to disgust and keep away, or drive away, persons who are really desirable settlers.....Every batch of Galicians put into the Northwest reduces the value of the country and tends to deter useful immigrants from going there⁴².” Referring to the *Brandon Independent*, the *Toronto Mail and Empire* asserted that “respectable settlers on the Edmonton road are moving away from good farms because there are Galicians in the neighbourhood⁴³”.

If these descriptions are to be believed, then prejudiced attitudes against the Ukrainians were as likely to affect the public’s interaction with them, as to simply be manifested in angry columns in print media. Petryshyn’s book presents various compelling examples of prejudiced statements directed at Ukrainians, made by journalists and politicians, and prejudiced responses to their arrival by their fellow settlers in the West. The statements he has compiled provide

⁴²*Halifax Herald*, March 18 1899, cited in Petryshyn, 99

⁴³*Toronto Mail and Empire*, April 10 1899, cited in Petryshyn, 101.

useful insight in the psychology of the Ukrainians' detractors. There were those who opposed them because a resolutely nativist attitude of loyalty to the British Empire compelled them to disparage non-British immigrants on principal as undermining the harmony of a fully English speaking colony. There were those who regarded their culture and ethnicity as being on some level inferior to the Anglo-Saxon peoples and were contemptuous of their impoverished peasant lifestyle. And there were those who regarded them with suspicion and distrust because their tendency to stick closely with those of a similar background appeared to them as a refusal to integrate with Canadian society.

Petryshyn's book is one of the most detailed sources to find contemporary comment on the Ukrainians that was less than positive. However, it offers only a fraction of the overall story. As much as Petryshyn's book is a valuable storehouse of primary sources from the period, he focuses primarily on relaying the voices that spoke out against the Ukrainians. We have seen earlier that there was still plenty of discussion in the early years of the Ukrainian immigration wave that was enthusiastic about the immigrants' arrival, welcomed their presence and emphasized the necessity of future incoming immigration. Therefore Petryshyn's narrative of near universal Ukrainian persecution at the hands of the Canadians before 1914 is not an accurate one. But the question remains; if the Ukrainians were not universally persecuted or despised before the outbreak of the First World War, how did so many still fall under suspicion of being enemies of the state and thus suffer the punishment?

Although British imperialists were inclined to reject outright anyone not descended from British stock, other immigrant groups received preferred treatment from the Canadian government. After Anglo-Saxons, the most preferred ethnic groups for immigration were from northern and central Western Europe, a policy that carried over between successive Canadian

governments. In 1896, with mass Ukrainian immigration underway, former Prime Minister Sir Charles Tupper (whose government had just been ousted by Sir Wilfrid Laurier's Liberals) spoke in Parliament in favour of an immigration system that was open to settlement by migrants from France, Belgium, Norway, Sweden and Iceland, due to their "being accustomed to a cold climate." Conservative Nicholas Davin of Assiniboia also endorsed the settlement of Germans, whom he referred to as "successful, thrifty, careful and prosperous"⁴⁴. In 1897, Liberal MP Frank Oliver drew a distinction between Germans and "Russians" (his nebulous term for all Eastern Europeans, perhaps in reference to the sheer quantity of Slavic peoples which were under the Russian Empire as much as the Austrian), declaring the "Russians ... a different race altogether" from the "desirable class" of Germans. "A small number of a desirable people," he added, "is very much to be preferred to a large number of undesirable people"⁴⁵.

Even the most active defenders of the Ukrainians in Canada (including Clifford Sifton) would have been exceedingly reluctant to apply such glowing terminology as Oliver did to the Germans. Once the First World War broke out, war propaganda and the statements of Canadian military and political leaders were quick to assert that of all the Central Powers, Imperial Germany was by far the greatest threat and the most powerful member of the alliance, to which the most frequent pejorative accusations of brutality, inhumanity, savagery and cruelty would be attached as the war progressed. The coming of war would see Germany loathed and despised as the greatest threat to Canadian freedom, whereas hatred of the Ukrainians was a more commonly expressed sentiment in advance of the war's outbreak, at least in certain circles. In wartime, however, this vitriol would continue to be directed at all Ukrainians regardless of whether they

⁴⁴Boudreau, 21.

⁴⁵Boudreau, 21.

were loyal to Austria-Hungary or Allied Russia. This generalized view of Ukrainians who were subject to these two different empires was heightened by the lack of any Ukrainian borders on the map of Europe and the non-existence of a clear Ukrainian state. This treatment occurred in spite of the fact that this division of Ukrainian territory between different European empires made the Ukrainians a far from homogenous group, in spite of their shared language. As much as historians such as Petryshyn might be accused of leaving out the positive aspects in favour of the negative ones when describing the early Ukrainian-Canadian experience, much of the prejudice displayed against them before 1914 would manifest itself again once the First World War broke out.

Historians Frances Swyrypa and Lubomyr Luciuk have written extensively on the Ukrainian Canadian internment, establishing themselves as prominent scholars in the historiography of the period due to the prolific nature of their work⁴⁶. Their works, however, manage to limit the tone of indignation and emotional frustration at the Ukrainians' historic plight that might have undermined the objective nature of the historical scholarship, opting instead to offer as broad a picture as possible and often succeeding in simply presenting "facts" without an excess of external commentary. Their books take care, for example, to point out that while many Ukrainians suffered unpleasant experiences while interned as enemy aliens during the First World War, the Ukrainian-Canadian experience during this period was not a universal

Luciuk's book *Canada's Ukrainians: Negotiating An Identity*, represents only one of many books he has written on the subject of Ukrainian-Canadian history. His book on the internment entitled "In Fear of the Barbed Wire Fence: Canada's First National Internment Operations and the Ukrainian Canadians, 1914-1920," is the most detailed of one of many smaller books he has written on the subject. Considering the frequency with which his work appears when studying Ukrainian-Canadian history, he can surely be considered one of the foremost experts on the subject. Like Frances Swyrypa, whose book "Loyalties in Conflict: Ukrainians in Canada During the Great War" is perhaps one of the earliest ones to examine the internment in detail, he himself comes from the Ukrainian-Canadian community and thus possesses an invaluable direct link to the community and its history.

one. Admittedly, at times these works do threaten to become merely a vehicle for Ukrainian-Canadian grievances over past wrongdoings by virtue of being published by specifically Ukrainian-Canadian organizations. Frances Swyripa's book *Loyalties in Conflict*, for example, was published by the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies affiliated with the University of Alberta. Swyripa's book, however, manages to maintain a strictly academic tone. Published in 1983, the book's list of sources indicate a scarcity of secondary literature created specifically to discuss Ukrainian-Canadian internment, instead having to rely on books with only partial relation to the subject. The secondary literature chiefly revolves around Ukrainian-Canadian history, the history of the First World War, and of the history of the Canadian labour movement as it related to the experience of immigrants from Eastern Europe.

His primary sources are suitably comprehensive, consisting primarily of contemporary newspapers, the private correspondence of figures such as General William Dillon Otter, the Internment Operations Files, the correspondence of various members of the government and civil servants, and assorted documents in the possession of the military. In Luciuk's books about the internment, it is true that there is some editorializing in the text expressing indignation at the collective experiences of those Ukrainians who were interned. However, they too rely on the same varieties of official documentation to substantiate their claims about the experience of internment. Subsequently these books have sufficient evidence to prove their description of the internment operations is not based on unsubstantiated exaggeration or unverified claims to advance the authors' agenda.

The outbreak of war in 1914 provided the spark that further ignited hostility against the Ukrainians. With the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, by the members of the Serbian-backed terrorist organization the Black Hand,

the subsequent Austrian ultimatum to the Serbs was to set in motion the chain of events that culminated in the Triple Entente Powers of England, France and Russia, declaring war on Austria-Hungary and its closest, most important ally, the German Empire. Canada, as a British colony, was now the enemy of all Austrian subjects, no matter where they dwelt or to which of the Austro-Hungarian Empire's multiple ethnicities they belonged. While the vast majority of Ukrainians were subjects of the empire of Tsarist Russia, the third member of the Entente powers and by extension a Canadian ally, those who lived in the provinces of Galicia and Bukovina were Austrian subjects⁴⁷. They were certainly unified by culture and language. But as the modern reunified Ukrainian state would not come into being until the Ukrainian War of Independence of 1917-1921, there was no common geopolitical entity to unite those of Ukrainian ethnicity.

Most of the Ukrainian settlers in Canada had originally come from Austrian territories. Thus Ukrainians in Canada began to receive accusations of disloyalty soon after the outbreak of war, regardless of whether it was under Austrian or Russian rule that they had originally lived before emigrating to Canada. While the suspicion of the Ukrainians may have been a reflexive one for many in English Canada, the concept that Galicians and Bukovinans in Canada might still feel some loyalty to the Austro-Hungarian throne was widely pervasive. This phenomenon came to the fore thanks to the controversial figure of Bishop Nykyta Budka, the primate of the Ukrainian Catholic church in Canada.

On 27 July 1914, as international tension increased over the spreading European diplomatic crisis following Archduke Ferdinand's murder, Bishop Budka issued a pastoral letter to his parishioners, and by extension to Ukrainian Catholics throughout Canada, advising them

⁴⁷Boudreau, 22.

of the distinct reality that the outbreak of war was imminent and that it was their duty to return to their homeland so that they could take up arms in defence of their original motherland. The Bishop characterized his congregants as fiercely loyal to the Hapsburg monarchy and seeking righteous justice for the murdered Archduke and his wife Sofia, both felled by Serb fanatic Gavrilo Princip, in a speech that was reproduced in a Ukrainian Canadian newspaper:

The Canadian Ruthenian Ukrainians....make evident their sentiments in church services for the assassinated ones, and in their prayers for the fate of their native land,....All Austrian subjects must be at home in positions to defend our native land, our dear brothers and sisters, our Nation. Whoever should receive the call should feel obligated to go to the defence of our threatened Fatherland⁴⁸.

It was hardly surprising that loyalty to the Hapsburg throne, and to the Emperor Franz Josef, should persist among many Ukrainians. Though Austria-Hungary encompassed a staggering array of ethnic minorities, many of them chafing under a regime that treated them as second-class citizens and stifled their ambitions for greater cultural and national self-determination, many Ukrainians still supported Imperial rule. For all the feudal poverty and desperation of the average Ukrainian living in the old country, the Ukrainians as a whole were one of the few ethnicities granted cultural and linguistic rights, economic benefits and political representation with the Imperial system⁴⁹. But it would not be very long before their solidarity with their Fatherland was to become a serious liability.

Two days after Britain declared war on Austria-Hungary, Bishop Budka hastily prepared a second letter in which he retracted his previous statement and urged Ukrainian Catholics in Canada to remain loyal to the British Empire⁵⁰. The bishop now claimed that his first letter had

⁴⁸*The Canadian Ruthenian*, August 1, 1914, cited in Donald Avery, *Dangerous Foreigners*, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979, 66.

⁴⁹Luciuk and Hyniuk, 289.

⁵⁰Luciuk and Hyniuk, 289.

been written “when few believed that [the war] would spread to other states.” Apparently aware of the fact that Canada’s entrance into the war might result in him being accused of disloyalty, he asserted that “it no longer serves any purpose and must not be read publicly,” and urged Ukrainians in Canada “to join the colours of our new fatherland...which has taken us to its bosom and given us protection under the banner of liberty of the British Empire⁵¹.” This hasty apology, however, did little good.

While the bishop felt compelled by a rapidly worsening climate of hostility to backtrack on his controversial statements, other members of the Ukrainian minority apparently saw no negative consequences for their countrymen in Canada by proselytizing aggressively for renewed loyalty to Austria-Hungary. Bishop Budka’s letter was printed with an editorial from Ukrainian-born academic Alexander Sushko, a member of a nationalist organization which saw Ukrainian protection by the Austrians as the only route to liberating the rest of the Ukraine from Russian rule. He now attacked the inclusion of the Russian Empire in the ranks of the Entente powers. In taking care to mention emigrants from Austria-Hungary in other parts of the world enlisting to fight in the Empire’s armies, Sushko’s editorial implied that he expected former Hapsburg subjects in Canada, and Ukrainians in particular, to follow close behind them:

Our sympathies have been, are and always will be on the side of European progress, that is to say, principally on the side of Austria which is especially well-disposed to us, and never on the side of barbaric Russian Tsarism, the age-old oppressor of the Ukrainian people and the mortal enemy of all progress and humanity.....Our sentiments have been conclusively and most accurately documented by recent reports concerning the enthusiasm with which our countrymen are hastening from all corners of the world...to take their place beneath the triumphant banners of Austria—hastening to manifest their loyalty to the remarkable Austrian Emperor and their love

⁵¹*Yorkton Enterprise*, 13 August 1914, cited in *Ukrainians In Canada*. Orest Martynowych, Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1991, 318.

and readiness to sacrifice their lives and fortunes for their families, for the future of their Fatherland and for the glorious destiny of their own people.⁵²

With prominent Ukrainians such as Sushko and the Bishop expressing pro-Austrian sentiment, it was only a matter of time before they would experience public backlash. On August 5, the *Manitoba Free Press* responded to the Bishop pungently, saying that Canada did not ask him to forget his former home, but that if he felt no duty towards Canada, he had “better get out of Canada and keep out⁵³.” The negative consequences of his words had already become apparent. . The words of the Bishop (regardless of how realistic it was that legions of Ukrainians would rush to fight for Austria on his exhortations alone) were swiftly seized upon to vilify an entire group for whom there had been increasing dislike before the war had even entered into the question. Speaking for the Ukrainians who originated in another Austrian province, Sushko desperately tried to adopt a conciliatory tone when he wrote that “the Ruthenian Ukrainians [those native to the province of Ruthenia] of Canada who have settled in this new country are sincerely attached to our New Fatherland, for which we are always ready in case of necessity, to give up our property and blood⁵⁴.” A subsequent editorial caustically replied that “mere lip-service to Canada means nothing when it is belied by the deliberate crusade which is in progress in this Province to establish “the Canadian Ukraine” by the resistance to compulsory education and the effective teaching of English⁵⁵.”

As had been the pattern for the first two decades of Ukrainian settlement in Canada, vitriolic attacks ensued from English Canadians in newspapers. These attacks highlighted a lack

⁵²*Canadian Ruthenian*, August 1, 1914, cited in Luciuk and Hyrniuk, 289.

⁵³*Manitoba Free Press*, August 5 1914, cited in Luciuk and Hyrniuk, 290.

⁵⁴Bishop Budka pastoral letter, August 8 1914, cited in Luciuk and Hyrniuk, 289.

⁵⁵“Must Become Canadians,” *Manitoba Free Press*, August 10 1914.

of recognition for the complexities of Ukrainian national identity. While the bulk of Ukrainian territory constituted a large and clearly defined province of the Russian empire, the fact that significant portions of Ukraine had been broken off to be dominated by the Hapsburgs meant that Ukrainians were not acknowledged or referred to as a truly distinct people, but merely as particular ethnic denizens of the Austro-Hungarian Empire's provinces. By and large, Anglo Canadians were ignorant of the Ukraine's prior history centuries before as a thriving, powerful and fully autonomous kingdom before its decline, defeat and dismemberment by its aggressive and increasingly powerful neighbours⁵⁶. As excusable as that might have been given that the Ukraine had ceased to be independent centuries before, it only added to the tendency to regard them as being universally sympathetic to Canada's enemies, regardless of whether they had originally been Austrian or Russian subjects before coming to Canada.

The war even brought a change in ethnic labels. Although English Canadians had referred to the Ukrainians as Galicians, Ruthenians or Bukovinans in previous decades (which admittedly were the only names by which those immigrants could refer to their places of origin), with the outbreak of war and Canada's taking up arms against the Central Powers, Ukrainians were increasingly labelled as "Austrians" along with other Hapsburg subjects. This heightened mainstream perceptions of Ukrainians as a hostile "other," as enemy aliens -- not a distinct people under the yoke of foreign Austrian rule -- who were duplicitous and enthusiastic agents of the Austrian emperor. The Ukrainians knew they were being addressed in vehement editorials from such individuals as Cecil C. Morgan, the secretary of the RNWP Veterans association, speaking in 1916:

⁵⁶Luciuk and Hyrniuk, 290.

...the country is permeated with Austrians and Germans prepared for some act of incendiarism or reprisal...We are living in a false security, which may any day be fatally dispelled unless we get Martial Law as a remedy and men to enforce it; and as in this city of Winnipeg foreigners who cannot speak a word of English are being sold ammunition by a leading firm, it is high time to wake up in the defense of our homes.⁵⁷

Private businesses took discriminatory actions of their own against Ukrainians and other enemy ethnicities. By 1915, an increasing number of enemy aliens were dismissed from their jobs in displays of “patriotism” by their employers. In other incidents that year, such as at the mines of Fernie, B.C. and Hillcrest, Alberta, the workers themselves went on strikes in order to force their employers to lay off all enemy aliens working as miners, resulting in 300 internments. (The first internment camp had been established on August 13 1914.) To further stoke the fires of animosity directed against them, there was a widespread belief among corporate overseers that Eastern-European immigrants generally, and Ukrainians specifically, were especially vulnerable to the influence of labour radicalism, and subsequently posed a subversive threat even before wartime and “enemy aliens” even entered into the equation. In Canada, left-leaning Ukrainian labour organizations such as the Ukrainian Farm Labour Temple Association, the printers of the newspaper the Ukrainian Labour News, and chapters of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party stoked public paranoia simply by virtue of their politics⁵⁸. The Russian Revolution, and the transformation of the territories of the Russian Empire into the communist Soviet Union, inflamed these concerns later in the war.

Those who called for the tightening of official sanctions against potential domestic enemies soon got their wish. The *War Measures Act* granted the government sweeping and comprehensive emergency powers that enabled the Cabinet to administer the war effort without

⁵⁷Luciuk and Hryniuk, 290.

⁵⁸Frances Swyripa and John Herd Thompson, *Loyalties in Conflict*. Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1983, 2.

accountability to Parliament or existing laws, including powers of media censorship, arrest, detention, deportation, and (of especial note in this case) the appropriation, control and disposal of property. Those regarded as enemy aliens were only a segment of Canadian society effected by the undermining of civil liberties that resulted from wartime security fears. No one arrested under the act could be released, discharged or tried without the express permission of the Minister of Justice⁵⁹. Canada, as a colony bound constitutionally to Britain, was also subject to the terms of the *British Nationality, Naturalization and Aliens Act* passed in May of 1914. It decreed that a foreigner had to have lived in Canada five years (rather than the previous three) before he or she could be considered a naturalized citizen, and an individual had to demonstrate an adequate knowledge of English or French. This last requirement targeted highly homogeneous, insular and self-contained Ukrainian communities.⁶⁰

The suspicion of this community, which had festered for years among English Canadians, came to a head in the paranoid and hysterical climate of wartime. Furthermore, since the new laws stipulated that naturalization and citizenship could only be granted after applying to a superior court judge, the Secretary of State now possessed absolute discretionary powers to withhold naturalization to people who were not deemed conducive to the “public good.” These decisions were designed to act against both recent immigrants and those immigrants who did not yet have the aptitude for maneuvering within the society of the English-speaking majority⁶¹. On August 15, 1914, everyone classified as a subject of an enemy country was declared liable to arrest and detention, especially if they tried to leave the country. Initially, authorities claimed

⁵⁹Swyripa, 3.

⁶⁰Luciuk and Hyrniuk, 290.

⁶¹Swyripa, 3.

that people who pursued their normal occupations would be left alone. Those suspected of seditious activities would be arrested and released only if they reported back periodically.⁶²

Furthermore, an Internment Operations Branch was created in 1914 within the Department of Justice, under the command of Major-General Sir William Dillon Otter, a prominent commander during the Boer War who was brought out of retirement to oversee the internment of enemy aliens⁶³. Internees were rounded up with the aid of the Department of Militia and Defence, the Royal North West Mounted Police, and the Dominion Police. Civilian registrars were appointed to register all enemy aliens according to age, nationality, place of residence, occupation, desire or intention to leave Canada, intention of military service, and next of kin. All aliens within twenty miles of a registrar's office had to report to it within a month of its opening. Others had to report monthly and were assigned internal travel documents and identification cards (if they were not interned immediately). By the time the internment operations ceased in 1920, twenty-four receiving stations and permanent internment camps had been established across Canada, in facilities ranging from tents, railway cars and bunkhouses to armouries, barracks, forts, exhibition buildings, and rented industrial factories⁶⁴.

Mere suspicion, regardless of evidence, could factor into one's being interned. By the calculations of Major-General Otter himself, of the 8,579 individuals interned during the six year period in which he headed the internment operations, only 3,138 could be classified as "prisoners of war," "captured in arms," or belonging to "reserves" of enemy armies⁶⁵. The rest of the internees were civilians who had been interned on suspicion of being "agents" of the enemy

⁶²Avery, 68.

⁶³Swyripa, 4.

⁶⁴Swyripa, 4.

⁶⁵Lubomyr Luciuk, *In Fear of the Barbed Wire Fence*. Kingston, Ontario: Kashtan Press, 2001, 6.

powers. The fact that the number of Ukrainians interned was only a fraction of the 80,000 enemy aliens who had been registered by the war's end suggests the unlikelihood that the number of Germans interned would exceed the Ukrainians in any eventuality⁶⁶. However, while only a fraction of Ukrainians were actually interned, the stigma associated with suspicions of disloyalty stuck to the community as a whole.

By 1920, 5,954 individuals classed as subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, encompassing multiple ethnicities including Ukrainians, had been interned. The harshness of the actions directed against Germans, the nation that the Allies considered the primary aggressor, was lesser by comparison. By contrast, only 1,192 Germans from within Canada were interned in this period⁶⁷. The selective manner in which praise to certain immigrant groups had been doled out in the pre-war years manifested itself in wartime practices. Although only a fraction of the total Ukrainian population in Canada was interned, the prejudices of the pre-war era had a tangible effect. The Germans, having first arrived in Canada in the mid 1700s, had a considerable head start over the Ukrainians in regards to time to assimilate, a process that was made easier by virtue of their being from Western, rather than Eastern Europe and consequently with greater cultural similarity to the Anglo-Saxon settlers⁶⁸. As we have seen, before the war many commentators who had condemned Ukrainian immigrants had also taken the time to praise the

⁶⁶Swyrypa, 3.

⁶⁷Avery, 57. The most complete analysis yet written of the manner in which anti-Ukrainian prejudice overlapped with fears of labour unrest in the early twentieth century can be found in Donald Avery's book "Dangerous Foreigners: European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada 1896-1932." Like Petryshyn Avery does a superb job of drawing from contemporary news sources and publications to provide a direct window into the period. Besides explaining in excellent detail another variety of tension in the form of anti-socialism and anti-communism that fed into prejudices against Ukrainians in Canada, by citing the words of various Ukrainian-born members of the far left in Canada, Avery provides a compelling demonstration of the outspoken opinions of a few individuals came to increase negative perceptions of the already much maligned Ukrainian-Canadians as a whole.

⁶⁸Heinz Lehman. *The German Canadians 1750-1937: Immigration, Settlement, and Culture*. St. John's, Jespersion Press, 1986, 2.

Germans, but it was other factors that caused prejudice against them to be relatively mild before the outbreak of war in comparison to the Ukrainians.

The Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 further complicated the Ukrainian internment. A few months after the February Revolution toppled the Tsar, resulting in the replacing of the provisional government of Aleksandr Kerensky with Vladimir Lenin's communist regime, the Soviet Union was proclaimed. The USSR encompassed the territories of the old Russian Empire, including most of the territory that made up Ukraine. While the Bolshevik takeover resulted in the Russians formally dropping out of the war, the internal affairs of Russia continued to attract international attention. The territories of Russia soon became embroiled in a bitter civil war, with the Bolshevik regime on one side and the anti-communist White armies (including an assortment of monarchist, parliamentarian and generally reactionary anti-communists) on the other. The conflict would soon involve the Western Allies, Britain and its commonwealth, including Canada. While Lenin's Bolsheviks were engaged in a desperate armed struggle for survival on their home soil, the perceived international threat posed by the Bolsheviks' interpretation of Marxism quickly became a source of anxiety for the non-communist world⁶⁹.

Many Canadians were shaken by the internationalist nature of Bolshevik ideology and its exhortations to the workers of the world to rise up in violent proletarian revolution. The war had strained the home front societies of the belligerent nations, leading to widespread concerns about social instability and fears of revolutionary upheaval in which radical political revolution could take root. The fear of communism spread quickly, and one of the first targets of that fear were citizens and subjects of what was now the Soviet Union⁷⁰. One of the targets of this new breed of

⁶⁹Avery, 57.

⁷⁰Avery, 58.

paranoia was naturally the Ukrainians, as Canada was hardly exempt from the growing crisis of Bolshevism-phobia now beginning to spread throughout Western nations. The Ukrainians as a group became even more blurred in their identity, as fears of potential traitors loyal to Austria-Hungary and fears of Bolshevik agents of Soviet Russia became blurred indistinguishably .

That the Ukraine soon became the seat of a rebellion to extricate the country from Russian domination was ignored insofar as this new Western hysteria over communism was concerned. The toppling of the Kaiser of Germany by a popular revolution in 1918 heightened the communism panic in the West, and the decision of Allied nations (including Canada) to send their soldiers to assist the White armies in Russia in their fight against the Bolsheviks paralleled a desire to crack down on potential Bolshevik saboteurs on the home front. The fears of Bolshevism would also exacerbate the pre-war paranoid stereotyping against Eastern European immigrants having a propensity towards violent ultra-Leftism⁷¹.

The Ukrainian labour newspaper *Robotchy Narod* condemned internment as a plot by English-speaking Canadian capitalists to increase ethno-racial chauvinism among the working classes in order to weaken the industrial unions and “to sow among the working class discord for the future.” This statement, however, did not stop the same paper from attacking the miners who had appealed for enemy aliens in the workforce to be laid off, and “who gave over to be arrested 300 of their brothers in order to increase their shifts by four hours⁷².” Not only were left wing newspaper editor such as this aware that their statements were giving the authorities increased suspicion to justify interning their people, but the internment itself apparently did not motivate them to adopt less inflammatory rhetoric. Even as Ukrainians were being interned, throughout

⁷¹Avery, 58.

⁷²*Robotchny Narod*, June 23, 1915, cited in Avery, 72.

1916 and 1917 Ukrainian socialists in Canada pushed to enlist all Ukrainian workers in industrial unions and the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party, directing their organizational efforts at Western Canada and northern Ontario. These statements only served to affirm Canadian officials' belief in the necessity of Ukrainian internment. At a rally in Winnipeg on March 25, 1917, *Robotchny Narod*'s new editor Matthew Popovich proclaimed:

We Ukrainian workers assembled at a massive meeting in Winnipeg send fraternal greetings to the Russian revolutionary workers with the arrival of a shining revolutionary triumph over the autocratic Tsar and the destruction of the prison of the peoples from which will also come forth thirty million Ukrainians. We are convinced that the Russian comrades will not stop at the complete overthrow of the political structure of Russia but will carry forth the struggle of the working people to fully victory over its enemies⁷³

By the spring of 1918 concerns over foreigners and communism in Canada had reached their peak. While radical left wing political activists with clear inspiration from the Bolsheviks were indeed openly active and giving officials cause for concern, many other innocents would suffer punishment for their militant activities. Besides a determination by the authorities to further punish Ukrainians as a whole for the words of a vocal minority of political activists with Bolshevik sympathies, leaders of business and industry saw Bolshevik subversion in every display of discontentment from the labour sector. When the Manitoba Gypsum Company faced a series of strikes, its officials charged that the strike had been fomented by foreign born unnaturalised workers. The low wages that employers had paid to men of foreign birth did not seem to cross the minds of people condemning the workers as natural provocateurs⁷⁴. The registrar of enemy aliens informed Colonel Sherwood, commissioner of the Dominion Police, that the English-speaking majority were increasingly irate over the "lenience with which these

⁷³*Robotchny Narod*, March 25, 1917, cited in Avery, 72.

⁷⁴Avery, 74.

Alien Enemies are treated.” To target strike leaders who were also enemy aliens for internment “would have a very beneficial effect upon the labour situation⁷⁵.”

Even Bishop Budka, who for reasons unknown was never interned despite his statements in favour of Austria-Hungary, was interviewed in June 1918 by Montreal lawyer C.H. Cahan to assert that there was a “distinct and well organized Bolsheviki movement in Canada” directed by the staff of *Robotchny Narod*. Cahan submitted a report to the Cabinet in September 1918 asserting that the Bolshevik conspiracy encompassed “Russians, Ukrainians and Finns, employed in the mines, factories, and other industries⁷⁶.” They were “being thoroughly saturated with the Socialistic doctrines which have been proclaimed by the Bolsheviki faction of Russia.” Cahan also claimed that Bolshevik delegates had recently come “to the United States, and no doubt in Canada to organize and inflame their comrades in America⁷⁷.”

Cahan’s report convinced the Borden government to implement more restrictions. Orders-in-Council PC 2381 and PC 2384 suppressed the foreign-language press and outlawed various socialist and anarchist organizations. The newspapers most affected by censorship were in the languages of groups already classified as enemy aliens: German, Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Estonian, Ruthenian, Hungarian, Turkish, Russian, Finnish, Croatian and Livonian. Almost all of the organizations outlawed by PC 2384 were composed of ethnic workers, most notably the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party, the Russian Social Democratic Party, and the Finnish Social Democratic Party. The penalties for possession of prohibited literature included fines of up to

⁷⁵Registrar of enemy aliens, Winnipeg, to Colonel Sherwood, August 17, 1918, cited in Avery, 74.

⁷⁶C.H. Cahan to Robert Borden, September 14, 1918, cited in Avery, 75.

⁷⁷C.H. Cahan to Robert Borden, September 14, 1918, cited in Avery, 75.

\$5000 or a maximum prison sentence of five years. Cahan was appointed director of a new Public Safety Branch under the Department of Justice to enforce these new regulations⁷⁸.

The end of the First World War did not bring an end to animosity against the Ukrainians. Continued Canadian military involvement in the Russian Civil War continued to justify the restrictions on enemy aliens from Eastern Europe, and the surge of Bolshevik-inspired revolutionary activity throughout Europe and in the United States after the war put the Canadian public further on edge. Consequently, pervasive anti-Ukrainian hatred survived in a new permutation, under the ostensible pretext of anti-communism. An editorial in the *Winnipeg Telegram* asserted: "Let every hostile alien be deported from this country, the privileges of which...he does not appreciate⁷⁹." In early 1919 the Borden government was deluged by petitions demanding that all enemy aliens be deported⁸⁰.

In 1921, Major General Otter published his "Report on Internment Operations Canada." Throughout the period 1914-1920 (when the Kapuskasing, Ontario camp-the last of the camps to remain in operation-was closed)," which noted that 109 internees of several camps, primarily those created to detain Ukrainians, had died of various diseases and injuries⁸¹. The injuries were incurred primarily from the forced labour. Typical camp labour was described by a Ukrainian internee in another camp in Ontario, a civilian farmer named Phillip Yasnowskyi. His account was translated decades after the fact by the historian Harry Piniuta;

Each one of us was supplied with a long-handled shovel, and we were conducted at bayonet point to a large building across the railway tracks. It was built of massive tonnes and guards were stationed around it. That was the camp jail. Nearby, some of

⁷⁸Avery, 76.

⁷⁹*Winnipeg Telegram*, January 28, 1919, cited in Avery, 76.

⁸⁰Avery, 76.

⁸¹ Major General Sir William Otter, K.C.B.,C.V.O.,*Report on Internment Operations in Canada*. Ottawa: Thomas Mulvey 1921.

the internees worked on road construction. They dug ditches on each side of a strip cleared for the road and pitched the earth onto the middle of the strip. Such was the exploitation of manpower in a forced labour camp⁸²!

The internees in the camps also had to endure violence from their captors. At the Castle/Banff compound, a location particularly notorious, overseers threatened internees who fainted at their work with bread and water for periods of three to fourteen days. Reports noted that prisoners were often prodded with bayonets, slapped, forbidden to speak or strung up by the wrists as punishment.⁸³ The troubling details of these incidents were recounted in reports in the possession of General Otter.⁸⁴

Three of the six individuals known to have been shot in the process of trying to escape the camps were Ukrainians. Most internees had dropped attempts to escape after eighteen-year old Andrew Grapko tried to escape the Brandon camp in June 1916 and was shot to death. A riot at the Kapuskasing camp in the same year, between 1,200 Austrian subject prisoners and 300 guards, was repressed with shots fired and the free use of bayonets by the guards. In another incident, a Ukrainian named Ivan Hryhoryshuk (dubbed an “Austrian” by the Winnipeg Free Press in the June 23, 1915 issue) was shot by a local farmer while attempting to escape from the Spirit Lake internment camp in northern Quebec⁸⁵.

Denying the prisoners food and subjecting them to solitary confinement were in some camps frequent disciplinary practices. At the Kapuskasing camp in 1917, internees were denied food when they refused to chop wood for the winter, an act which was itself a protest against the

⁸²Philip Yasnowski, quoted by Harry Piniuta in *Land of Pain, Land of Promise: First Person Accounts by Ukrainian Pioneers 1891-1914*. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978.

⁸³Martynowych, 329.

⁸⁴Major General Sir William Otter, K.C.B., C.V.O., *Report on Internment Operations in Canada* (Ottawa: Thomas Mulvey 1921).

⁸⁵Luciuk, 25.

rations being reduced. They eventually capitulated due to the oncoming winter⁸⁶. In regards to other methods of coercion, in correspondence with General Otter the Kapuskasing commandant Colonel W.D. Date asserted that “I think that they have had enough of strikes and that prisoner being shot by a sentry the other day has made them realize what they are up against. It has been their boast that we were afraid to shoot, and that all orders to that effect was bluff⁸⁷”.

The decision by the Canadian government to intern people of Ukrainian descent during and immediately after the First World War was as much influenced by prejudices within centered around race, ethnicity and culture as it was by fears for the state of national security. In a time of war, when the public at large were prepared to loosen their ostensible commitment to democratic principles out of fear of spies, traitors and saboteurs in the service of the nation’s enemies, ultimately the first culprits they were to select for punishment were those who some had regarded as enemies right from the beginning, even as the Ukrainian’s precarious position as first an area partially under Austrian rule and secondly a satellite of the Soviet Union was used as justification to regard its people with suspicion.

Not all the Ukrainians in Canada were interned, high though the numbers were. Approximately 4,000 Ukrainians had been interned by 1920, roughly half of the aforementioned 8,579 internees mentioned in General Otter’s report⁸⁸. This was out of the 17,000 Ukrainians living in Canada in 1914⁸⁹. Not all Ukrainians were interned to be subjected to the harsh conditions associated with many of the internment camps. Thus the Ukrainian experience during the First World War was not one of universal suffering or degradation, for all the stresses the

⁸⁶Boudreau, 37

⁸⁷Boudreau, 37.

⁸⁸Luciuk, 4.

⁸⁹Wsevolod Isajiw and Andrij Makuch, *Ukraine and Ukrainians Throughout the World*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994, 333.

climate of wartime might have placed on the Ukrainian-Canadian community as a whole.

Nevertheless, the story of those who had the misfortune to endure the worst aspects of internment must still be told, as a testament to the strain that wartime invariably places upon democratic values.

In the decade after the last internment camps for enemy aliens on Canadian soil closed down, the Ukrainian-Canadian community returned to some semblance of normalcy. They would still find that even after the period of active government harassment ceased, Ukrainian community organizations (namely those associations created specifically to advance Ukrainian interests which we will examine later) would have to put extra effort into trying to persuade the federal government to act in their interest -- or rather in the interest of those relatives in their mother country who would presently become victims of one of the greatest catastrophes in its modern history.

However, not even the end of the First World War, the end of Canadian intervention in the Russian Civil War, or the closing of the internment camps meant the end of official mistrust of the Ukrainian minority, or the lingering of the prejudices that had their origins in the 1890s. On into the 1920s and 30s, the perception that Ukrainians were prone to political violence and sedition persisted to the extent that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police continued to monitor their activities. (The books cited here cite extensive collections of documents from the RCMP and its predecessor the RNWP in order to verify the extent to which these organizations were preoccupied by this persistent belief.) In 1919, Commissioner A.B. Perry, leader of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police (which would become the Royal Canadian Mounted Police the following year), did not have to mention the Ukrainians directly when speaking disparagingly of 'foreigners' in the prairie provinces. He referred broadly to "...these people, who, as a body,

have shown little appreciation of the just and fair treatment meted out to them by the people of this country. They have shown themselves ready to follow and support the extremists who play upon their ignorance and appeal to their national prejudices and sympathy for the central powers. Bolshevism finds a fertile field among them and is assiduously cultivated by the ardent agitator⁹⁰.”

His remarks demonstrated quite well that Ukrainians were regarded with suspicion as much for being supposed Bolshevik agents as they were accused of being Austro-Hungarian sympathizers, even as the First World War (and the Austro-Hungarian Empire with it) came to an end and Soviet communism became the perceived threat to national security in question. However, even the defeat of the Central Powers did not put an end to official apprehension about Ukrainian nationalism, even as these concerns overlapped with the fear of Bolshevism. In 1920 (the year in which both the internment camps were closed and the Allied intervention in the Russian Civil War came to an end), a 1920 RCMP report commented negatively on the activities of Ukrainian nationalists.

Describing a large meeting of Ukrainians in Alberta, the author of the report remarks indignantly that “speakers did not refer to assimilation with the Canadian race or the fostering of Canadian ideas in the educating of their children, advocating only Ukrainian Nationalism⁹¹.” As some Ukrainian Canadians became caught up in their country’s desire to assert its identity following the demise of the Russian Empire and the rise of the Soviet Union, the RCMP continued to regard their activities as suspicious and disloyal. Another RCMP report from 1920

⁹⁰“Report of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police for the Year Ended September 30, 1919”, 14, cited in *The Prairie West As Promised Land*. Calgary, University of Calgary Press, 2007, 313

⁹¹Security Bulletin 42, September 23 1920, cited by R. Douglas Francis and Chris Kitzan, *The Prairie West As Promised Land*. Calgary, University of Calgary Press, 2007, 313.

made note of an incident in Drumheller when Ukrainian schoolchildren refused to salute a flag. It also acknowledged the existence of a distinct Ukrainian boarding school in Saskatoon affiliated with the University of Saskatchewan, known as the Peter Mohyla institute⁹².

The report also noted the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox theological seminary established in Saskatchewan, some of the members of which were keen on maintain Ukrainian cultural traditions such as the flag and language. These schools continued to be regarded with suspicion by Commissioner Perry's successor, Cortland Starnes. He discussed them in a letter to Albert premier Herbert Greenfield in 1923. While it is difficult to verify the accuracy of his startling assertions, they painted the schools as a hotbed of both Ukrainian nationalist zealotry and fanatical Bolshevism. (Whether the 'revolution' Starnes claimed the schools promoted was in this case communist or simply one of Ukrainian liberation from Russia is not clear;

The principal subjects to be taught are the Ukrainian language, folk-songs, and revolutionary songs and music. Every effort is made to induce the children to hate religion, patriotism, and the government and social and economic system of Canada, and to desire and expect revolution, with its accompanying horrors. Great use is made of concerts; the elders are encouraged to attend entertainment at which the children furnish the programme, most of the recitations, songs etc. having revolutionary tendencies. Sometimes the children act revolutionary plays. The evidence is that these are attractive to the parents. Great hostility is shown to the public schools, which are incessantly denounced as designed to darken the understandings of the children, to teach militarism and religions, and to bolster up capitalism. Bitterness is shown towards those Ukrainians who imbibe Canadian ideals⁹³."

To this Starnes added an assertion that would have made perfect sense to those who had earlier condemned the Ukrainians as Soviet-sympathetic rabble-rousers; ".....nationalities dabble in this activity from time to time, but not in so systematic a manner as the Ukrainians....." Starnes was of the opinion that the solution to the disloyalty supposedly fomented in the

⁹²Francis, 314.

⁹³Cortland Starnes letter to Herbert Greenfield, 1923, cited in Francis, 315.

Ukrainian schools was to deport their teachers⁹⁴. Later in the 1920s RCMP agents took interest in a female Ukrainian orchestra travelling western Canada. Their reports noted with displeasure that while the orchestra's performances began with a singing of "O Canada," it was skipped at the end. An Edmonton-area undercover Mountie reported on another concert in detail. He declared that "The whole sentiment of the concert was anti-Canadian and revolutionary in the extreme, dangerous to the peace of the country in as much as it was inciting the workers to revolution." He asserted that the many children present at the concert, though mostly Canadian born and fluent in English, applauded the act because they were already being indoctrinated with revolutionary propaganda⁹⁵.

Adding that "ninety percent" of the audience were "foreigners, mostly Ukrainians," he concluded that "the spirit of the audience was revolutionary" after a group rendition of "The Red Flag." In correspondence with these fears, the RCMP spent the period under the leadership of Commissioner Starnes working closely with Canadian immigration authorities to limit the admission of "undesirables" into the country, conducting more naturalization investigations than criminal ones between 1919 and 1939. R.B. Bennett's conservatives, who rose to power in 1930, were sympathetic to the RCMP's proposal that those of foreign background suspected of radical political activity be deported for their actions⁹⁶.

In 1931 RCMP Commissioner MacBrien went to Ottawa to meet with Chief of the General Staff Major-General McNaughton, justice minister W.A. Gordon, the Minister of Defence Donald Matheson Sutherland and the commissioner of immigration, to discuss a plan to deport unnaturalised communists. A military barracks in eastern Canada became an RCMP

⁹⁴Cortland Starnes letter to Herbert Greenfield, 1923, cited in Francis, 315.

⁹⁵Francis, 315.

⁹⁶Francis, 316.

“immigration station”⁹⁷.” On May 10, 1932, John Sembay, a member of the Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association in Edmonton, was deported on the grounds that RCMP surveillance had made note of several statements of a revolutionary nature made by him, and on the grounds that the Mounties believed the ULFTA to be connected to the Canadian Communist Party. (This statement was based on the testimony of Sergeant John Leopold, who had infiltrated the CCP⁹⁸.)

This information illustrates that suspicion of the Ukrainians did not end with internment, and that at least as far as confirmed and suspected Ukrainian nationalists were concerned, this official prejudice was to some extent shared by the Canadian government as well as the RCMP into the period of the Bennett government. There were indeed Ukrainian nationalist organizations (or simply organizations dedicated to the preservation of a distinct Ukrainian identity) that Bennett himself evidently regarded as dangerous and subversive. He granted the RCMP carte blanche to investigate these groups even as other Ukrainian organizations would later make petitions to him directly on behalf of their people. It is, however, not possible to prove definitively that Bennett harbouring suspicion of Ukrainian nationalists somehow affected his policy towards the Soviet Union. To make such a claim would be based largely on speculation and conjecture. The newly emerging Ukrainian organizations that focused on promoting the newly emerging idea of Ukrainian nationhood in the interwar period continued to be regarded with official suspicion.

However, their existence demonstrated the Ukrainians’ increasing adjustment to their new surroundings in Canada, and the growth of established communities from the earliest colonies of farmers. There were more organizations devoted to the promotion of Ukrainian

⁹⁷Francis, 316.

⁹⁸Francis, 316.

interests, which as we shall see become more comfortable trying to reach out to the federal government to promote said interests. So, with this in mind, what factors did influence the course that Canadian policy towards the USSR was to take under Bennett's leadership? We have seen how the positive reception to the early Ukrainian settlers by some was interspersed with popular resentment and hatred by others. We have seen how the events of the First World War and the Russian Revolution resulted in the Ukrainians being categorized as a national security threat by the Canadian government and the object of increased popular paranoia and distrust. And we have seen how to some extent this distrust at the official level carried over into the postwar era with the RCMP's suspicious attitude towards Ukrainians interested in advancing the idea of their own distinct nation and culture, an attitude partially endorsed by Ottawa. While this information makes clear that the Ukrainians relationship with the Canadian government and people was a complex one, does it factor into later events, or merely provide context to the relationship between the Ukrainians and Ottawa?

Chapter 2.

Background to the Holodomor: Extermination By Hunger

This chapter shall examine the origins of the Holodomor itself-the mass social catastrophe in the Ukraine of which the governments of Canada and Great Britain became aware, and which complicated further the Canadian government's historically conflicted relationship with the Ukrainian people. The Holodomor, or Ukrainian famine of 1932-1933, created by Joseph Stalin to serve his political aims, was a premeditated and deliberate act carried out through the state apparatus under Stalin's control, and was effectively a genocide because of its effect upon the Ukrainian people. The term 'genocide' is applicable because the Soviet policy of state terror through artificially constructed famine was directed at the Ukrainians on an ethnic/national basis. While Stalin's plan may not necessarily have been to wipe the entire Ukrainian people out of existence (like other genocides in which the perpetrators sought a total, final solution as their end goal), his policies were calculated to have widespread, devastating effects on the Ukrainian nation as a whole. Modern historians have placed the death toll at between 2 and 7 million⁹⁹. Before the famine was over, knowledge of its existence had spread to servants of several Western governments, and been relayed to the general public through the activities of a minority of determined journalists.

Foreign observers and representatives who witnessed firsthand the state of affairs in the Ukraine had evidence at their disposal to demonstrate that the mass starvation of the Ukrainian people was artificially exacerbated by the Soviet regime, though they were not fully aware of the reasoning of Stalin or his subordinates that compelled them to enact such destructive policies.

⁹⁹David R. Marples. *Heroes and Villains: Creating National History in Contemporary Ukraine*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007, 50.

Why did the Soviet government of Joseph Stalin, already determined to bring brutal punishment upon its political enemies in Russia and the other Soviet nations, decide to concentrate on punishing the people of Ukraine with particular wrath? How precisely did the Soviet Union orchestrate an artificial famine in the country that claimed millions of lives?

The purpose of this chapter is not to provide the most complete and thorough historical analysis possible of the Holodomor, though it will examine in detail the origins of the famine and the political circumstances that led to its creation. In and of itself the Holodomor has already been studied by many historians, several of whose works (such as those of prominent Sovietologist Robert Conquest) have been cited in the notes and bibliography of this thesis. Discussing the background of the famine itself could easily fill an entire composition (and subsequently shift the focus of this thesis onto the famine as opposed to primarily examining the Anglo-Canadian response to the famine). Thus this chapter shall aim to distill the origins and causes of the famine into sufficient space that it can be examined in detail without overwhelming the overriding argument. The main purpose is to demonstrate the famine's origins in deliberate Soviet policy, and to provide insight into the government in Moscow's reasoning behind said policy.

The first and paramount question is what Stalin stood to gain from carrying out the famine, given the considerable power that he wielded as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union ruling over millions of people. The roots of his decisions lay in the series of events set in motion by the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the ensuing civil war, when Ukrainian nationalists seized the opportunity to declare independence from Russia. The Ukraine, with its vast agricultural wealth of fertile arable land for the cultivation of grain, was the wealthiest territory in Russian possession. Accordingly, the Bolsheviks under Vladimir Lenin

sought to regain control of the land under the guise of suppressing the anti-communist counterrevolution. Despite the military defeat of the Ukrainian rebels by the vastly superior Soviet forces, the suppression of the people's insurrectionist tendencies proved considerably more difficult. Underground revolutionary anti-Soviet organizations, peasant revolts and the writings of the rebellious intelligentsia continued to proliferate. These activities continued even after the assassination of Symon Petlura, the former President of Ukraine and Supreme Commander of the Ukrainian armed forces, in Paris in 1926 by an agent of the Soviet secret state police, the OGPU¹⁰⁰

By the late 1920s, when General Secretary Stalin had consolidated his power after deposing his co-ruler Leon Trotsky, unity and internal strengthening of the Soviet Union became his top priority. This meant the expunging of separatist ethnic elements within the greater Soviet state, and the Ukraine was the nearest place to being looking for them. In 1929-1930, Stalin began mass executions and deportations of the leaders of the underground revolutionary organizations and the bulk of the Ukrainian intelligentsia¹⁰¹. It was still necessary to break the resistance presented by the greater mass of the Ukrainian peasantry, who Stalin regarded along with peasants in general as a threat to Soviet unity. Stalin's first great experiment to curtail the power of these divisive forces, increase the power of the Soviet state, and actualize the Marxist egalitarian dream to collectivize agriculture. This policy had dire consequences for the Ukraine's predominantly agricultural economy and subsistence system.

¹⁰⁰Joseph Oleskiw. *The Agony of a Nation*. London: The National Committee to Commemorate The 50th Anniversary of the Artificial Famine in Ukraine 1932-1933, 1983, 14.

¹⁰¹Rohdan Serbyn and Bohdan Krawchenko, *Famine in Ukraine: 1932-1933*. Edmonton, Alberta, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1986, 6.

Collectivization involved the abolition of private control of agriculture by the individual peasant landowners, or kulaks, in order to centralize control of all food in state hands on the pretense that it then could be distributed equally among the people. This program provided Stalin with a pretense to crush the rebellious tendencies of the Ukrainian people and increase his personal control, as well as that of the Soviet state, over the land.

Official statements made immediately preceding and at the beginning of the famine confirm that Stalin's policies were premeditated and clear in their motivation and objective. The statements of Pavel Postyshev, Party Secretary of the Kharkiv Oblast and officially designated representative of Stalin in the Ukraine, argued that the subjugation of Ukrainian impulses towards national self-determination in favour of submission to Russian interests was a key objective of Stalin's government. On the cusp of the famine in the summer of 1932, he wrote, ".....the Bolsheviks always fought and are continuing to wage an implacable struggle against Ukrainian nationalism, burning out with a heated iron all chauvinistic Petlurite elements [a reference to the assassinated Ukrainian nationalist Simon Petlyura], no matter under what false national banner they might be found."¹⁰²

While statements such as this were private correspondence and thus not accessible to the public or to international representatives, those foreigners present in the Ukraine at the time of the famine would soon witness the consequences of this rhetoric for themselves. Later in the year, as the famine entered into its advanced stages, Postyshev declared that "the year 1933 brought the complete defeat of the nationalist and Petlura elements as well as of the other hostile

¹⁰²Pavel Postyshev, Address to the plenum of the oblast Committee of Kharkiv, Summer 1932, cited in Oleskiw, 28.

elements (in Ukraine) which have infiltrated into the various sectors of the socialist structure.”

The statement was to be reproduced two years later in a published political pamphlet.¹⁰³

Despite Stalin’s earlier rhetorical attempts to separate the campaign against kulaks from the struggle against the forces of Ukrainian nationalism, Postyshev’s rhetoric against peasant farmers intensified as the famine approached. His speech to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, in which he directly advocates the forcible seizure of foodstuffs from the peasantry, anticipated the government tactics that were soon to be employed against the Ukrainian people as a whole:

Comrades, the Party and Comrade Stalin have ordered us to terminate the process of collectivization by the spring. The local village authority needs injections of Bolshevik iron. You have to begin your work without any manifestations of rotten liberalism. Throw out your bourgeois humanitarianisms on the garbage pile and act as Bolsheviks. Destroy kulak agents wherever they raise their heads. The kulaks, as well as the middle-class peasants and even paupers, do not give up their wheat. Your task is to get it by any and all means. You must squeeze it out of them. Do not be afraid to employ the most extreme methods¹⁰⁴.

Stalin believed that subjugation of the peasant majority of Ukrainians was vital to maintaining control of the nation, evidenced by his written comment in 1925 that “the nationality question is by its basis a peasant question¹⁰⁵.” While these statements declaring the intentions of Stalin and his cohorts were of course confidential material at the time of the famine, the clear signs of a deliberate and state-orchestrated policy of starvation would later be evident to foreign visitors to the Ukraine. In late 1933, Mendel Khataevich, Secretary of the Dnipropetrovsk Regional Committee and Central Committee member (as well as one of the chief organizers of the program of Ukrainian forced collectivization), wrote of a “ruthless struggle”...“a struggle to

¹⁰³Pavel Postyshev, *Fight for the Leninist-Stalinist Policy*. Kiev, 1935, 112.

¹⁰⁴“Address by M. M. Khatayevich of Party

Organizers in 1933”, from Viktor Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom*, New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1946, 130.

¹⁰⁵Oleskiw, 19.

the death” between the Ukrainians and the Bolsheviks. “This year,” he noted, “was a test of our strength and their (the Ukrainian peasants’) endurance. It took a famine to show them who is master here. It has cost millions of lives, but the collective system is here to stay. We have won the War.”¹⁰⁶

These statements demonstrate prevailing themes—the view of Stalin and his subordinates that the peasants of the Ukraine constituted an adversary to the Bolsheviks that had to be overcome, and a conviction that starvation, via the forcible seizure of food, was the way to wage war against them. Collectivization was used as the primary official justification for the policies that were implemented, even though the kulaks had been largely obliterated as a class in Ukraine and all throughout the Soviet Union by 1932, leaving a majority of peasants with considerably less (if any) agricultural wealth in their possession to attract the wrath of the state¹⁰⁷. As Stalin pressed for a more efficient agricultural system to compliment the breakneck speed at which he was forcing industrialization to proceed under the Five Year Plans, the possibility increased that Soviet satellites such as the Ukraine would be forced to take the fallout.

The Ukraine was quite capable of producing considerable amounts of grain and was endowed with huge agricultural wealth, even as export quotas of increasingly irrational heights were imposed upon it by Moscow. The peasants had responded to collectivization by slaughtering their livestock rather than surrendering it all to the state. This had the effect of dropping the amount of meat exported but unwittingly it deprived the Ukraine of animal labour for future harvests¹⁰⁸. The 1930 quota of 7.7 million tonnes of grain, which was 2.3 times the amount of grain marketed in the best pre-collectivization year, was realized, representing a third

¹⁰⁶Mendel Khataevich diary, 1933, cited in Kravchenko, 130.

¹⁰⁷Serbyn, 17.

¹⁰⁸Serbyn, 19.

of the total Soviet harvest of 23 million tonnes. The 1930 quota had only barely been met, however, and only under miraculous circumstances. Despite its wealth, the Ukraine only exported internationally 27 percent of all grain harvested in the USSR.¹⁰⁹

The export quota system was vital to Stalin's Five Year Plans-the system by which the USSR would rapidly industrialize itself by setting goals for manufacturing output and the construction of modern infrastructure across five year intervals. Stalin intended to pay for the components of this infrastructure with the profits obtained from the international sale of Soviet grain and other commodities, in attempt to turn the USSR into a major industrial power within the space of a few years. As much as the high quotas for the production of grain were affected by Stalin's impatient to realize this goal, it would soon become apparent that the Soviet government had other motives for imposing such shockingly high quotas upon the Ukrainians¹¹⁰.

The quotas set by Stalin demanded that the Ukraine export 38 percent of its grain, and the quota of 7.7 million tonnes of grain did not change in 1931 despite the fact that the amount of land sown had declined significantly as a result of the disorganization caused by collectivization. That year, official figures claimed that the Ukrainian harvest had dropped to 18.3 million tonnes, of which 30 percent was lost during the actual harvest due to deliberately poor practice. This caused production to drop still further to only 7 million tonnes, so that initially Stalin had agreed to petitions from the Ukrainian soviet regime to lower the quota to 6.5 million tonnes. The 1932 Ukrainian harvest was less than two-thirds of the achievement of 1930¹¹¹. Stalin justified the

¹⁰⁹Serbyn, 19.

¹¹⁰Serbyn, 19.

¹¹¹Serbyn, 7.

dramatic decrease in grain exports to justify still more draconian measures to ensure that the quotas were met in the face of what he presented as sabotage by internal enemies of communism.

The first of these measures decreed that “socialist property” was inviolate, so that punishments ranging from imprisonments of upwards of ten years to the death penalty could be meted out to anyone who so much as stole an ear of wheat or bit the root off a sugar beet -- an action that became to be known as the infamous “ear law¹¹²”. The next step was the economic blockading of entire villages that were accused of sabotaging the grain procurement campaign, which entailed the immediate closing of stores and the removal of their goods, a complete ban on all internal trade, immediate halting and calling in of all credits and advances, and thorough purges of local co-operatives and state institutions¹¹³.

The situation was worsened further by the vagueness with which the term “kulak” was applied, even though Stalin claimed to be carrying out a struggle against them long after the height of collectivization. Despite Soviet propagandists’ portrayal of kulaks as massively wealthy, the average income of all peasants in 1924 was only 200 rubles. Kulaks supplied only a fifth of the marketable grain surplus of the Soviet Union, and in 1929 the property of 33,000 peasant households had been confiscated for failure to meet grain quotas¹¹⁴. The collectivization campaign would result in widespread starvation and suffering for peasants throughout the Soviet Union, even though its effects would be rendered more virulent in the Ukraine by the specificity with which its people were targeted by the Kremlin. In the Ukraine alone, the state classified

¹¹²Stephen Courtois, *The Black Book of Communism*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999, 162.

¹¹³Miron Dolot, *Execution By Hunger*. New York, N.Y.:W.W. Norton and Company, 1985, 173.

¹¹⁴Serbyn, 17.

71,500 households as “kulak” in 1929, of which 200,000 had been “liquidated” (stripped of their assets) according to official state sources by 1932¹¹⁵.

The Soviets employed both violent and passive means to extract grain from the Ukrainians. In the Dnipropetrovsk oblast, visiting assizes of the regional court sentenced peasants to death by firing squad for the theft of a sack of wheat. By the beginning of 1933, 75% of the quota of 4.7 million tonnes of grain was met, leaving the average Ukrainian peasant family with only 80 kilograms of grain upon which to subsist for a whole year. When the famine started in 1932, this amount had dropped from 112 kilograms¹¹⁶. While there was a natural variable in the form of a drought (confined mainly to the steppe region), the situation was worsened when 40% percent of the harvest was lost because of the government’s letting policy which meant that grain which could not be exported was left to rot in silos. A visiting American journalist, Harry Lang of the *New York Jewish Daily*, observed at the time the famine was ongoing that “as we travelled through the vast expanses of Ukraine...we saw fumes rising up out of the huge stacks of grain in the fields...the grain was rotting.”¹¹⁷

Other deliberate steps taken by the Soviet government compounded the fragile situation created by the harsh edicts of collectivization. Red Army sentries were placed in fields of grain to guard against even a vestige being stolen. That grain which had been collected was stockpiled in heavily-guarded depots. Party official Victor Kravchenko (who would later defect to the United States in 1944) wrote in his private accounts in the autumn of 1933 that these reserves existed “in many other parts of the country, while peasants in those very regions died of hunger.”

¹¹⁵Serbyn, 17.

¹¹⁶Serbyn, 17.

¹¹⁷Harry Lang, *Le Courrier Socialiste*. No. 19, 1933.

By his account half of the people living in his village had already succumbed to starvation.¹¹⁸

The Soviet government completely neglected to inform foreign relief organizations of the famine, and when they finally accepted foreign aid in late 1933, representatives of groups such as the American Famine Relief Association were denied passage within Soviet borders¹¹⁹. Most telling of all, to ensure the safe passage of requisitioned grain from out of the Ukraine (or so it was claimed), thousands of Soviet OGPU troops were stationed to garrison the country's borders, even erecting barbed wire to trap the population in the barren countryside¹²⁰. The government confiscated everything from beets to pumpkin seeds, with executions and deportations meted out to those who refused to comply.¹²¹

The Holodomor was effectively a genocide (despite the technical term having not yet entered into circulation) directed towards Ukrainian people, given its distinctly ethnic component. The onset of the famine was preceded by a vigorous Soviet policy of “de-Ukrainization,” which involved direct attacks upon institutions upholding a separate Ukrainian national identity. The previous attacks made by Stalin had been directed towards general groups and classes, such as clergy and kulaks, who existed in virtually all the nations under Soviet rule. These targeted all such groups in all subject territories equally, in accordance with the supposedly internationalist ideological tenets of Marxism, but more specifically to consolidate Stalin's personal control. While these groups were also victims of the Soviet state in Ukraine, Stalin began making several direct blows against Ukrainian ethnicity. This classified what

¹¹⁸ Victor Kravchenko. *I Chose Freedom*. New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1946.

¹¹⁹ Martin Amis. *Koba The Dread*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2002, 138.

¹²⁰ Courtois, 164.

¹²¹ Dolot, 167.

occurred next as being more akin to a genocide against an ethnic group rather than merely an instance of mass slaughter.

The final famine represented the culmination of years of systematic planning on Stalin's part. It had begun quietly enough just a few years prior, with the Ukrainian historian Mativii Iavorsky coming under attack in 1929 for approaching Ukrainian history as a separate history in its own right, as opposed to a mere extension of Russian history and therefore a mere appendage of the Russian state itself¹²². In that same year, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church, under the umbrella of the general violent anticlerical purges that occurred all throughout the Soviet Union, was officially dissolved or "liquidated," with about 40 Metropolitans, Archbishops and Bishops and 20,000 priests and monks slated for imprisonment or execution. This included the Church's first Metropolitan, Vasyl Lypkivsky, who was imprisoned and executed after ten years of confinement in 1937¹²³. In 1930 the Union of the Liberation of Ukraine was subjected to one of Stalin's show trials for promoting an autonomous Ukrainian history and a distinct Ukrainian language. Considering the determination of these intellectuals to preserve Ukrainian national culture and identity, it is telling that 80% of the Ukrainian intelligentsia was wiped out by the famine. This coincided with the 50,000 members of the Ukrainian Communist Party purged between June 1932 and October 1933, sentenced to execution or deportation to the eastern gulags¹²⁴.

The most important evidence of genocide lies in the human costs that the artificial famine exacted on the Ukrainian population. Although historians debate the final death toll, the numbers are astronomical for events that transpired within the space of a single year. The official Soviet

¹²²Serbyn, 5.

¹²³Oleskiw, 22.

¹²⁴Serbyn, 23.

census published in 1939 put the Ukrainian population at 28,111,000 people, down from 31,195,000 in 1926. This suggests a drop of more than 3 million people in population¹²⁵. Talk circulating within the circles of the Soviet elite for years afterwards suggests a number as high as 10 million¹²⁶ -- a staggering figure made more incriminating in that the 1937 Soviet census was withdrawn before distribution and its compilers put on trial for allegedly conspiring to discredit socialism. To this day no consensus on the accuracy of this second 1937 census has been reached¹²⁷. Stalin himself is recorded in the minutes of the Yalta Conference in 1945 admitting to the 10 million figure in conversation with Winston Churchill¹²⁸.

The death of 3 million people would constitute 10% of the Ukrainian population at the time. Dmytro Solovey puts the final total at 6.5 million¹²⁹, but Sovietologist Robert Conquest (whose book *The Great Terror* was substantiated by copious Soviet documents) puts the final figure at roughly 14 million.¹³⁰ More recently historians have put the figure at 7 million¹³¹. Regardless of which of these figures is correct, any one of them would make the event comparable with the Nazi Holocaust, and serve to accentuate Stalin's premeditated barbarity. In short, the Holodomor, created to serve Stalin's political aims, was a deliberate act carried out through the state apparatus under his control, and constituted genocide because the Soviet policy of state terror, through artificially constructed famine, was directed at the Ukrainians on an ethnic/national basis. It was not until decades after the fact that historians were able to provide true insight into the innermost workings of Stalin's Kremlin at the time that the famine was being

¹²⁵Serbyn, 10.

¹²⁶Isajiw, 19.

¹²⁷Serbyn, 11.

¹²⁸Amis, 148.

¹²⁹Serbyn, 20.

¹³⁰Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*. London: Pimlico Books, 1992, 4.

¹³¹Marples, 50.

deliberately engineered by the Soviet state. It is also not clear as to whether or not those foreign representatives in the Soviet Union paid attention to the public exhortations from Bolshevik leaders agitating for draconian measures to be used against the kulaks. However, while these observers (namely journalists and foreign representatives) may have lacked a direct window into Stalin's thought processes, they still had opportunity to witness for themselves that the famine was far from being rooted exclusively in natural causes.

Chapter 3.

The Holodomor, Canada and the British Foreign Office

How did information about the deliberate nature of the Soviet campaign of starvation in the Ukraine find its way to Western governments? How did the Western governments respond to the famine, and why did they respond (or not respond, as the case may be) as they did? Now that we have examined the history of Canada's relationship with its Ukrainian population and the history of the Holodomor as a suitable background, it can provide some context as to how the governments of Canada and Great Britain became aware of what precisely was happening in the Soviet Ukraine, and why exactly they took the course of action that they did. What triggered their response was the information they received on conditions in the Ukraine from the reports of international journalists, as well as the evidence compiled by their representatives visiting the region.

The uncertainty and indecisiveness surrounding Western nations' attempts to confront the USSR on the economic level was further compounded by the international journalistic reporting on the state of Soviet affairs, in which those journalists who had first-hand experience of the starvation and terror endured by Soviet citizens struggling to be heard while competing for the public's attention with journalists determined to downplay the stories of suffering. One journalist whose eye on Soviet starvation (in the Ukraine in particular) resulted in him gaining the attention of at least a subsection of officialdom was the Welsh reporter Gareth Jones. Jones is credited with being the first foreign journalist to report on the starvation in the Soviet Union that was reaching a terrible peak in 1932-33, and manifesting itself with particular virulence in the Ukraine. Jones not only did much of his travelling throughout the Soviet Union during the same period in which Andrew Cairns, the first Canadian to become aware of the true nature of the

Soviet famine, was sending his regular dispatches to the British Foreign Office, but he also utilized in his articles information obtained from journalists and dignitaries who had interviewed Cairns.

While in the Volga region, Cairns had been permitted by his Soviet hosts to meet with a group of visiting British journalists. Among them were Kingsley Martin, editor of the *New Statesman*, and Dr Jules Mencken from the London School of Economics. Despite the fact that the Soviets were anxious to deflect several of these men's questions about conditions for the Soviet people that they posed to Cairns, Gareth Jones utilized parts of the information he himself gleaned from them to write two articles entitled "Will There Be Soup?" for the *Western Mail* on October 15 and 17 1932.¹³² Cairns and Jones were to both share corroborating stories of the starvation that existed in the Soviet Union in this period, everywhere from the Central Black Earth district to Western Siberia to Kazakhstan, as well as the North Caucasus and Ukraine¹³³.

With his own findings lining up with those of Cairns, his link to the Foreign Office and subsequently to the collective economic decision makers of the British Commonwealth nations, one would think that Jones would be in a position to help push for stiffer international action against the Soviet Union's intolerable human rights record. But he found himself forced to compete with the contradictory accounts of a considerably influential fellow journalist. This was none other than the American journalist for the *New York Times* Walter Duranty. After Jones' stories of Soviet starvation were released to the international news reading public, Duranty was later to win journalistic acclaim denying Jones' reports on the existence of a Soviet famine.

¹³²Gareth Jones. "Will There Be Soup?" *Western Mail*. October 15 1932.

¹³³Ray Gamache. *Gareth Jones: Eyewitness to the Holodomor*. Cardiff: Welsh Academic Press, 2013, 178.

Duranty, a man who on a number of occasions had expressed admiration for Joseph Stalin and the Soviet communist experiment¹³⁴, relied on official proclamations from the Kremlin to assert that the reports of mass starvation were entirely false. His most notable article taking this position was published in the *New York Times* on March 31 1933, entitled "RUSSIANS HUNGRY BUT NOT STARVING." Duranty's article referred contemptuously to the journalism of Gareth Jones, and in fact seemed to imply that his stories were merely an attempt by the British to draw international attention away from the uncomfortable accusations that were being directed at them during the incident of the Metropolitan-Vickers trial:

"In the middle of the diplomatic duel between Great Britain and the Soviet Union over the accused British engineers, there appears from a British source a big scare story in the American press about famine in the Soviet Union, with 'thousands already dead and millions menaced by death from starvation'¹³⁵ ."

It also cited Kremlin sources which declared; "Russian and foreign observers in country could see no grounds for predications of disaster". However, on the 13th of May Jones published a strong rebuttal to Duranty's story in the same newspaper;

My first evidence was gathered from foreign observers. Since Mr. Duranty introduces consuls into the discussion, a thing I am loath to do, for they are official representatives of their countries and should not be quoted, may I say that I discussed the Russian situation with between twenty and thirty consuls and diplomatic representatives of various nations and that their evidence supported my point of view. But they are not allowed to express their views in the press, and therefore remain silent. Journalists, on the other hand, are allowed to write, but the censorship has turned them into masters of euphemism and understatement. Hence they give "famine" the polite name of 'food shortage' and 'starving to death' is softened down to read as 'widespread mortality from diseases due to malnutrition'. Consuls are not so reticent in private conversation.¹³⁶

¹³⁴Gamache, 139.

¹³⁵Walter Duranty, "Russians Hungry But Not Starving". *The New York Times*, 31 March 1933.

¹³⁶Gareth Jones, "Mr. Jones Replies". *The New York Times*, 13 May 1933.

It was not long before a letter from Soviet Foreign Commissar Maxim Litvinov to the British politician Lloyd George asserted that Jones was forbidden from ever returning to the Soviet Union¹³⁷ Some argue that Jones' eventual death in China in 1934 was engineered by the then latest incarnation of the Soviet secret police, the NKVD.¹³⁸ By contrast, Walter Duranty was wildly applauded at a November 1933 dinner for Maxim Litvinov at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City. Duranty was eventually to receive a Pulitzer Prize for his dubiously authentic journalism, though even at the time the decision was contested. According to *New York Times* writer Carl Meyer, Duranty depended on Stalin's rise and "stroved to preserve it by ignoring or excusing Stalin's crimes."¹³⁹

Yet his Pulitzer Prize was not revoked. With a journalist for one of the world's most influential newspapers continuing to be lauded for his reporting on the state of everyday life in the Soviet Union, it made sense that many people in positions of influence in international governments might fail to see the urgency of reports of deliberate terroristic famine against the Soviet people. Many, it would seem, were inclined to trust Duranty as the man who had the officials of the Kremlin to back his claims, and to contrast this with the obvious official disdain which Jones had incurred. Though Britain and its commonwealth had an ear on Soviet events through Jones, the wide acceptance of Duranty's reporting created a comfortable international climate for those prepared to ignore the harsh realities of Soviet domestic policy. (Certainly disinformation about the Soviet Union was widespread enough, as we shall see later, for the skewed reports of less than objective Soviet admirers such as the prominent British socialist Sydney Webb were to be presented as fact in a Canadian parliamentary debate.) Apparently even

¹³⁷Gamache, 214.

¹³⁸Gamache, 210.

¹³⁹Carl Meyer, "The Editorial Notebook; Trenchcoats, Then and Now". *The New York Times*, 24 June 1990.

the fact that the massive scale of the famine in the Soviet Union had already been widely and thoroughly reported on before Duranty published his claims did not significantly undermine his credibility in the eyes of the Pulitzer committee.

One must assume that they paid no attention to contradictory reports from non-American newspapers. On March 10 1932 the Toronto-based *Globe* had published that the Soviet government had admitted to the existence of widespread famine in the USSR affecting forty million peasants. The Soviets admitted that the affected areas (consistent with the Cairns report) were the Urals, West Siberia, the Middle and Lower Volga basins, Bashkyria, the northern Caucasus and Ukraine. Of course, this official Soviet announcement did not divulge the government's role in the deliberate creation of this famine or its indifference to the suffering of this affected by its calls to meet increasingly higher grain quotas. The newspaper attributed starvation in the Ukraine to "backwardness of preparations for the spring sowing," and claimed that the millions of tons of grain that Stalin had supposedly decreed were to be shipped to the distressed regions was "proceeding slowly because the Soviet railways are unable to cope with the additional traffic."¹⁴⁰ Another hampering factor is the reluctance of affected districts to relinquish grain which officials contend is stored up."

This was perhaps the only passage in the article to allude to the grain-hording tactics of which the Soviet regime was guilty. While the article contained statements from the Dominion Bureau of Statistics asserting that this starvation would mean the Soviets would soon be off the international export market for grain, an additional statement by J.F. Jackson of the Norris Grain Company in Chicago proved that Soviet grain shipments to the United States were still coming¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰"Conditions of Famine Throughout Russia Admitted By Moscow". *The Globe*, 10 March 1932.

¹⁴¹*Globe*.

. The assertions of these experts that Stalin's regime would cease exporting grain out of concern for starving Soviet citizens betrayed an unfortunate lack of understanding of his motives where the Ukrainians in particular and "kulaks" in general were concerned.

That the starvation was on a massive scale was a fact that should at least have been brought to the attention of Western governments due to it being reported on repeatedly in the news media. Though as a reporter for the newspaper the *Manchester Guardian* the British journalist Malcolm Muggeridge was a rival to Gareth Jones, his personal investigations substantiated those made by Jones regarding the origins of the Ukrainian famine. Muggeridge's articles submitted to the *Guardian* on the 25th¹⁴² and 27th¹⁴³ of March 1933 had been researched by travelling the region without the permission of Soviet officials, and made a portrayal similar to Jones' of the circumstances there. Similarly, readers of the British newspaper the *Daily Express* would doubtless have seen the headline from August 6 1934 describing the effects of famine in the region¹⁴⁴.

Meanwhile, the first Canadian to become aware of the reality of Soviet policy in regards to agriculture (and to substantiate the reports of the international journalists) was Andrew Cairns, an agricultural specialist who until 1931 worked as Director of the Department of Statistics and Research in the Canadian Wheat Producers' Pool in Winnipeg, Manitoba¹⁴⁵. While his report was originally compiled for the benefit of this organization, it appears that he came to the realization that the governments of Canada and Great Britain should be made aware of his

¹⁴²Malcolm Muggeridge, "The Soviet and the Peasantry An Observer's Notes I: Famine in North Caucasus". *The Manchester Guardian*, 25 March 1933, Pages 13 & 14.

¹⁴³Malcolm Muggeridge, "The Soviet and the Peasantry An Observer's Notes II: Hunger in the Ukraine". *The Manchester Guardian*. Monday 27 March 1933, Pages 9 & 10.

¹⁴⁴"The Horror of the Ukraine: Unbared By Tourist With Secret Camera". *Daily Express*, August 6 1934.

¹⁴⁵Isajiw, 52.

findings. Cairns' trip to the Soviet Union is mentioned in other books, but it is in *Famine-Genocide in Ukraine, 1932-1933: Western Archives, Testimonies And New Research*, edited by Wsevolod I. Isawij and published in 2003, that the events of his trip receive the only detailed and concise summary to be made for the benefit of those without direct access to the primary source documents of Cairns' reports. Additionally, however, the report itself received its most recent reprinting in 1989, by the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Alberta¹⁴⁶.

While this book was published several decades after the famine, it contains documents that at the time would have been in the possession of the Western governments whose representatives in the Ukraine witnessed the famine. The Cairns' report itself was a vital document in revealing the origins of the Ukrainian famine in Soviet state policy. It was eventually circulate through the ranks of both the British and Canadian governments, even though the press attention it received would be minimal and restricted to British newspapers.

Cairns first visited the Soviet Union in 1930 on behalf of the Canadian Wheat Producers Pool, when Stalin's programs for the collectivization of agriculture in all the Soviet republics, as well as his Five Year Plans for the crash industrialization of the country, were both well underway¹⁴⁷. The report of this 1930 visit that Cairns compiled eventually found its way to the British archives¹⁴⁸. During Cairns' first trip he met officials in Moscow and Leningrad, several state and collective farms, agricultural machinery plants, and the principle food export ports on the Black and Azov seas¹⁴⁹. As we shall also see later, the extent of his travels throughout the USSR made clear to him the widespread nature of the privation and suffering caused by Stalinist

¹⁴⁶Andrew Cairns. *The Soviet Famine 1932-33*. Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1989, 1.

¹⁴⁷Isajiw, 52.

¹⁴⁸Isajiw, 52

¹⁴⁹Isajiw, 52.

collectivization, though it was distinguished from the suffering caused in the Ukraine by the nation being forcibly closed off at its borders by the secret police (as was discussed in the chapter outlining the background to the Holodomor) as a central component of Stalin's campaign to target the country deliberately. Even in the years before the full wrath of the Soviet state was to come down on Ukraine, Cairns had ample opportunity to witness the effects of Stalin's agricultural policies upon the Soviet people.

Cairns held a positive first assessment of the collective farms, declaring the idea was "thoroughly sound as peasant agriculture [was] extremely primitive and inefficient¹⁵⁰" Machinery could "easily" increase agricultural production, and would surely also help the government to "take the lion's share of the crop". In spite of Cairns' assessment of the poor quality of life for so many Soviet citizens, he did not deny that the considerably quantity of grain that the Soviets exported in 1930 was largely due to "exceptionally good crop particularly [from] regions near export outlets." From his observations Cairns drew two important conclusions. One was that the amount of grain the Soviet Union would export internationally would only increase as part of Stalin's drive to increase industrialization with the funds obtained from the export of raw materials and foodstuffs¹⁵¹.

These observations would conflict with the limitations to this increase in grain exports he perceived; the Soviet railway system was in disrepair, there was a lack of grain handling equipment and ports to ship grain from other than those near the Black Sea, the population was the fastest growing in Europe and its per capita consumption of bread was the highest in the world due to it being the primary food available to the peasantry¹⁵² Cairns' concerns

¹⁵⁰Isajiw, 53.

¹⁵¹Isajiw, 53.

¹⁵²Isajiw, 53.

foreshadowed that future difficulties where feeding the population was concerned were already on the horizon for the Soviet Union as a whole, let alone in places like the Ukraine specifically. (And indeed, he had not at this stage even taken into account the possibility of aggressive actions being taken by the state contributing to the hunger problem.) Cairns was also concerned that farmers in Canada would continue to lose international markets for their grain, as it would be unable to compete with the cheap Soviet grain that Stalin was trading internationally in return for the machinery that would make the goals laid down by his Five Year Plans a reality¹⁵³.

In an article regarding the Soviet policy of “dumping” its wheat in foreign markets, the London correspondent for the Australian newspaper *The Sydney Morning Herald* had written on November 25, 1930, that on the Baltic Exchange Soviet wheat was priced at 24 cents American per 7 rounds¹⁵⁴. Meanwhile, Canadian wheat was priced at 64 cents per two bushels (the Canadian dollar in this period apparently being roughly on par with the American one in terms of value¹⁵⁵). Furthermore, according to Gareth Jones (writing for *The Western Mail* on April 6th 1933), the value of Soviet exported wheat would drop to 1,200,000 British pounds in 1932 from 6,800,000 pounds worth in 1931¹⁵⁶.

By the beginning of the 1930s it was apparent to various economic observers in the West that Soviet economic policy under Stalin depended to a large extent on exporting vast quantities of grain overseas in a manner that threatened to utterly saturate the market. On September 25th, 1930, the Toronto *Globe* had reported from a special dispatch to its New York office that former

¹⁵³Isajiw, 53.

¹⁵⁴“World’s Wheat: Soviet Dumping. Home Supplies Exhausted.” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Wednesday 26 November 1930.

¹⁵⁵“Historical Statistics of Canada Section M: Agriculture”, www.statcan.gc.ca. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-516-x/sectionm/4057754-eng.htm>

¹⁵⁶Gareth Jones, “Soviet Dwindling Trade.” *The Western Mail*, 6 April 1933.

Vice-President of the Amtorg Trading Corporation Basil W. Delgass had claimed to have laid bare the true motives of the Soviet regime behind its economic interactions with the West. Delgass' statements were coloured by an obvious suspicion of Soviet communism, but his assessment of the situation was not far removed from the realities of Stalin's policies. Delgass asserted that the Soviet regime had adopted a fixed policy of dumping its low-priced wheat abroad with the object of overwhelming and undermining foreign agricultural markets, thereby aiding Stalin's agenda of fomenting global communist revolution¹⁵⁷. While this may have been speculation Delgass' part, the sheer quantity of Soviet wheat being exported internationally due to its low price would have dire consequences for the Ukrainians, as it was being removed from the area in alarming quantities.

Delgass also alleged that once it had used this technique to exert suitable economic intimidation upon the United States, it would use its advantage to force American recognition of the Soviet state. Delgass, after resigning from his post in Moscow without giving the Soviets an explanation, was sentenced to death by the Soviets in absentia¹⁵⁸. His reasoning would likely have made sense to Prime Minister R.B. Bennett, who would enact a partial embargo on the import of Soviet goods into Canada in 1931 due to his own apprehensions regarding trading with the Soviets¹⁵⁹. While it was difficult to fully verify Delgass' assertions about a revolutionary conspiracy behind Soviet foreign trade (especially seeing as this was a period in which Stalin's regime was more committed to internal strengthening of the Soviet state than the aggressive promoting of international communist revolution) there were a number of astute statements in his observations regarding the cost of collectivization to the Soviet people;

¹⁵⁷*The Globe*, 25 September 1930.

¹⁵⁸*The Globe*, 25 September 1930.

¹⁵⁹Andrew J. Williams, *Trading With The Bolsheviks*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992, 187.

Russia today presents the extraordinary spectacle of a country being starved and impoverished by a Government pursuing the fantastic policy of depriving its own people of the things they desperately need in order to dump them abroad at cheap prices as a means of creating disorganization, discontent and revolution in other countries.....To be sure, there is also another aim to this policy, namely, that of obtaining capital for the Soviet industrialization plan, but the two go together¹⁶⁰.”

Delgass was correct in asserting that Stalin sought to finance his vastly accelerated plan for the industrialization of the Soviet Union through his Five Year Plans with the profits obtained from the international export of goods such as grain and wheat. He was also correct that the subsequent frantic rush to meet the government’s increasingly high quotas for grain exports were having dramatic consequences for the peasantry. They were forced to submit to the system of state agriculture and work for its enrichment with little benefit to themselves. It would nevertheless take time for any world government to take such things into considering when managing their economic relations with the USSR. While some of his statements that the Soviet plans for rapid industrialization had failed completely were inaccurate, Delgass spotlighted many of the concerns shared by other individuals who were apprehensive about some of the implications of Soviet-Western commerce;

It is certainly an unprecedented performance to see a Government so lacking in self-respect as to engage in short-sale wheat operations on foreign markets....When you consider the general economic and financial situation abroad, the widespread unemployment, the dislocation of industry and the depression of agriculture, it would be rash to say that Soviet Russia’s tactics can do no damage. At the same time it may be difficult to stop this dumping.....While I am against a general embargo on Russian imports, and favor the development of Russo-American trade, I do think that the importation of Soviet convict-made goods, such as lumber and pulpwood, should be stopped. There is not the slightest doubt that these goods are produced by convict labour.....In certain regions in the country famine is already a fact; the Urals for example.....Yet the Soviet Government is quite content to expropriate grain and let the Russian people starve....Claims that things are going well in Russia, that the collectivization of agriculture is a great success, that the five year plan of industrialization is being realized, are absolutely unfounded. The grain collections are

¹⁶⁰*The Globe*, 25 September 1930.

going badly, and the program set by the Government will not be accomplished without the most ruthless kind of pressure on the peasantry. This is as true of the collective as it is of the individual peasants.¹⁶¹

Delgass here states his belief that the Soviet regime is acting without regarding to the welfare of its subjects in order to further its economic goals by forcibly expropriating grain from the peasants, and that these practices also pose a threat to the economic welfare of the USSR's trading partners such as Canada. Foreshadowing the cautious responses of Western governments to this information, he is reluctant to propose a total economic boycott of the Soviets even as he declares that some action must be taken in the face of Stalin's malicious behaviour. Taking the factors described in Delgass' reports into account, Cairns felt compelled to continue to monitor the state of Soviet agriculture despite the "rigid censorship" he was subjected to, and the possibility that he might be accused of "espionage" in the process¹⁶². Even before Cairns began working directly with the British government, he was concerned with the manner in which their agricultural policy in regards to the Soviet Union was proceeding. He wrote a letter to the British Department of Overseas Trade to suggest that an agricultural attaché be appointed to the British Embassy in Moscow to supply the government in London with reliable information, but he was rebuffed¹⁶³.

In 1931 Cairns was offered a job by the Empire Marketing Board in London, which looked after the agricultural interest of the Empire by providing agricultural intelligence on the principal exporting and importing countries. Cairns was tasked with assessing the value of

¹⁶¹*The Globe*, 25 September 1930.

¹⁶²Isajiw, 53.

¹⁶³Isajiw, 53.

published agricultural statistics from South America, the Balkans and the USSR in particular¹⁶⁴. Arriving in Moscow on the 21st of April 1931, Cairns soon got to work interviewing various foreign engineers, businessmen, and other individuals who were either visitors to the USSR or commissioned by the Soviet government to help oversee the growth of the Soviet economy¹⁶⁵.

Cairns issued a report on May 3, 1932 detailing these conversations, during which it was repeatedly asserted to him that the Soviet economy was in a catastrophic state. Cairns heard stories of food shortages in rural areas, the low productivity and appalling living and working conditions of Donbas miners, and the shockingly low output of the Ukrainian collective farms. The British embassy in Moscow could report that in the Soviet capital at least the food situation was adequate¹⁶⁶. But Cairns' further journeys throughout the Soviet Union in the same period confirmed the inadequacy of the new system of collectivization at keeping the people fed. Cairns spent a month travelling through the agricultural districts of Western Siberia, Kazakhstan and a few other areas along the Volga in addition to his Ukrainian tour. The report of June 5th that he sent to the Foreign Office mentioned acute food shortages in Western Siberia, and mass starvation deaths among the herders of Kazakhstan. Starvation was also widespread in the Volga, where those foodstuffs that were available were shockingly expensive.¹⁶⁷

These accounts of starvation testify to the fact that suffering from Stalin's policies of collectivization was widespread. However, it was only in the Ukraine that the engineered starvation was intended to target the nation as a whole, rather than as a general consequence of Stalin's policies of "de-kulakization" (targeting of the peasantry) as part of his collectivization

¹⁶⁴Isajiw, 53.

¹⁶⁵Isajiw, 53.

¹⁶⁶Cairns 3-47.

¹⁶⁷Cairns, 3-47.

plan. While peasants all across the USSR who refused to join the state collective farms were targeted with seizures of their food by the state, only the Ukraine fell victim to a campaign to keep their entire country from extricating itself from Moscow's control¹⁶⁸.

In response to these reports, some British government officials were in favour of banning the importing of Soviet wheat into Britain or any of its dominions so "that it would be impossible for Mr. Cairns to paint another picture such as this¹⁶⁹." In fact, these early documents highlight perfectly the potential that Cairns' discoveries had to alter not only the economic policy of virtually the entire British Commonwealth towards the Soviet Union, even while simultaneously drawing attention to yet more of the obstacles in the way of such a plan. The aforementioned quotation comes from the minutes commenting on Cairns' report from Foreign Office employee C.H. Bateman on June 28th 1932.

Bateman makes a point of mentioning in his notes for the benefit of his superior Sir Edmund Ovey how these discoveries could have had direct impact on the then upcoming Ottawa Conference where the representatives of the various dominions were to meet to discuss the British Empire's economic future;

"It seems to me that this report should be in the hands of all those who are to have say at Ottawa. As the outcome of the Ottawa Conference will probably be the acceptance of the principle of the wheat quota, it would be not only to the common interests of the Empire, but also an act of humanity for the Empire at least to make up its mind to exclude Russian wheat from its markets until we can be satisfied that the conditions in

¹⁶⁸Serbyn. 5.

¹⁶⁹Sir Esmond Ovey (Moscow) to Sir John Simon 21 June 1932, and Andrew Cairns to E.M.H. Lloyd, 7 June 1932, "Conditions in Western Siberia, Kazakhstan and Certain Districts along the Volga", cited in Carynnyk, 10.

. Easy access to several of these documents can be owed to Marko Carynnyk, Lubomyr Luciuk and Bohdan S. Kordan's book *The Foreign Office and the Famine: British Documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-1933*. It is perhaps the single most complete collection of British foreign office documents to focus on this singular event and the years immediately prior to and after it. Apart from the foreword and introduction, the documents are presented without additional commentary and are grouped only according to topic, allowing for a more objective presentation of the evidence without being filtered too heavily through a historian's secondary analysis.

Russia are such that it would be impossible for Mr. Cairns to paint another picture such as this¹⁷⁰.

While eventually this optimistic plan would be revealed as an implausible one, Bateman also inadvertently acknowledged another important obstacle that existed to encouraging firm economic action against the Soviet regime while continuing to editorialize on Cairns' findings on the Soviet collective farms;

“It is a record of over-staffing, over-planning and complete incompetence at the centre; of human misery, starvation, death and disease among the peasantry. The pity of it is that this account cannot be broadcast to the world at large as an antidote to Soviet propaganda in general and to the obiter dicta of such temporary visitors as Mr. Bernard Shaw, Lord Marley and others¹⁷¹.”

This passage makes reference to a number of wealthy, influential people, many of them respected intellectuals such as the British writer George Bernard Shaw. They were escorted on tours of the Soviet Union by its government, and whose sympathy with the outwardly idealistic, liberal and reform-minded rhetoric of Soviet communism lead them to declare that the Soviet people lived lives devoid of starvation and shortages. Shaw was to assert confidently that no conditions of famine existed in the USSR.¹⁷² Bateman's point is that in spite of the fashionable nature throughout the Western world of vehement anti-communism such as that espoused by Canadian Prime Minister R.B. Bennett, admiration for the Soviet social experiment (combined with a desire to ignore, downplay, apologize for or simply conceal outright the Soviet regime's crimes against humanity) was an attitude actively promoted by influential leading citizens naïve to the regime's true nature.

¹⁷⁰Sir Esmond Ovey (Moscow) to Sir John Simon 21 June 1932, and Andrew Cairns to E.M.H. Lloyd, 7 June 1932, “Conditions in Western Siberia, Kazakhstan and Certain Districts along the Volga”, cited in Carynnyk, 10.

¹⁷¹Carynnyk, 10.

¹⁷²George Bernard Shaw et al, “Social Conditions in Russia: Recent Visitor's Tribute, *The Manchester Guardian*, March 2 1933.

These individuals' propaganda extolling and defending Stalin's regime, covering up its incompetence, its indifference to the suffering of its people as a direct result of said incompetence, and even those instances in which their suffering was the result of deliberate aggressive action by the state, constituted a powerful force which a dissenting voice seeking to broadcast the truth would have to confront in the battle of information. Cairns' report had to go up against both misinformation from other sources and blind spots in Western knowledge of Soviet government activities in order to communicate its content to those with the influence to respond appropriately.

Laurence Collier, the head of the Northern Department of the Foreign Office, asserted that what Cairns had seen had to be a famine. By June 1932, Cairns was beginning to see the direct effects of the increasingly aggressive agricultural policy of the Kremlin on the local population. At first the starvation in Ukraine did not stand out particularly for him because he had observed similar conditions in the northern Caucasus in the same period. But a more thorough tour of the region, including the Crimea, yielded alarming evidence of the particularly dire nature of starvation in the Ukraine. The conditions shocked Cairns because in his work keeping track of Soviet grain exports from the Ukraine, he knew that the previous harvest of 1931 had been a good one. He witnessed people dying of starvation on the streets of Kiev, and witnessed similar scenes of destitution at every railway station. He described the situation as follows;

Every station had its crowd—from scores to several hundred, depending on the size of the town—of rag-clad hungry peasants, some begging for bread, many waiting, mostly in vain, for tickets, many climbing on to the steps or joining the crowds on the roof of each car, all filthy and miserable and not a trace of a smile anywhere.¹⁷³

¹⁷³Cairns, 49.

As Cairns toured these regions, he was told on numerous occasions (in spite of the large number of secret police active in the area) by the locals that their hunger was the result of most of the available food being confiscated by the government. They also asserted that this confiscation was so that the government in the Moscow Kremlin could export the food¹⁷⁴. The prices of the available food were only slightly lower at the market in the Dnipropetrovsk district, despite Cairns having been assured by a government official that conditions there were much better¹⁷⁵. More conversations with locals informed him that all the cattle had either been killed or died of starvation, so there was no milk, meat or butter to be had. It appeared that the year 1932 had witnessed the culmination of an extended period of dramatic loss of livestock. Cairns obtained official statistics that revealed that between 1928 and 1931, the oblast had lost 57 percent of its horses, 70 percent of its cattle, 76 percent of its pigs, and 87 percent of its sheep¹⁷⁶.

With losses this catastrophic in the previous years, the assertions of the locals that there was no livestock left was certainly a plausible outcome for 1932. With a British embassy official named M. Vyvyan in the region of the Crimea, Cairns witnessed farms where the primary crop was weeds, and those children they saw had bloated stomachs. A stopover in Rostov, where the privations of the locals were not quite as extreme as in Ukraine, nevertheless demonstrated to Cairns and Vyvyan the effects of collectivization upon Soviet agriculture. The gigantic state collective farm at Verblud of over 200,000 acres, despite it being one of the most important show farms to be frequently showcased to foreign visitors, still contained an abundance of weeds,

¹⁷⁴Cairns, 50.

¹⁷⁵Cairns, 51.

¹⁷⁶Isajiw, 55,

insects and broken equipment. At the Gigant farm, Cairns reported that the fields produced even less per acre than at Verblud¹⁷⁷.

The farm workers who Cairns talked to asserted that the deterioration of the food situation had begun following the onset of mass collectivization in 1928, become difficult by 1930, terrible in 1931, and for many shockingly severe by 1932, as the regime had sought to export ever higher amounts of food for the foreign market. In North Caucasus a government official who heard Cairns' concerns simply replied; "The worst of the pressure to export was over....and the Party fully realized that the local people were too enthusiastic and had collected too much grain, especially in the Ukraine¹⁷⁸....". Cairns' further observations of the machinery of Soviet collectivization indicated that the regime's highly exacting grain export quotas were taking their toll on the civilian population even in places where, unlike the Ukraine, the locals were not quite regarded by the state as enemies (apart from those who suffered as a direct result of the government's ongoing policy of "de-kulakization.") He heard repeated stories of the government demanding of various farms more wheat than the fields could possibly produce, resulting in several of them shutting down outright¹⁷⁹. These accounts would certainly be plausible given the high quotas that Moscow was then demanding of the peasant farmers.

Admittedly those agricultural concessions under the control of foreign experts hired by the Soviets, such as the German-overseen one at Drusag, produced an abundance of wheat for export as well as wool and leather for the uniforms of the secret police, the GPU. After being joined at Drusag by Otto Schiller, the agricultural representative from the German Embassy, on the 27th of July Cairns left for the Ukrainian capital of Kharkiv for another, more thorough tour

¹⁷⁷Cairns, 86.

¹⁷⁸Cairns, 87.

¹⁷⁹Cairns, 87.

of the country. On their train journey he recorded that they noticed “poor, weedy crops, very little hay or summer fallow and much uncultivated land.” Hence, Cairns was surprised by the statistics of grain production and livestock that were presented to him by the economic department director in Kharkiv, asserting that the harvest had been an abundant one¹⁸⁰.

The same official also admitted that harvesting the 1932 crop would be “an extremely difficult task, more difficult than any previous year¹⁸¹.” From this information Cairns concluded that the government was presenting an estimate of the amount of harvest available in the Ukraine that was far too high, and for the state to collect as much grain as it had declared would push the state of starvation in which the people were living into a full-blown famine¹⁸². Even as Cairns’ travels gave him ample exposure to the suffering of the Soviet people as a whole under collectivization, he could still detect that special pressure was being put upon the people of the Ukraine by Moscow.

Arriving back in Moscow on July 31st, Cairns sent a cable to London asserting that the 1932 harvest for the Ukraine and North Caucasus would be significantly lower than the previous three years. He acknowledged that environmental factors would influence this outcome: “This is because the spring sown grain crops were poor to very poor being short, thin and choked with weeds due to late seeding on unprepared land¹⁸³.” This in itself might not have surprised the Canadian government, given the manner in which agriculture on the North American prairies was suffering from the dust bowls. Subsequent details of his report, however, would reveal aspects of the famine that had little to do with natural circumstance.

¹⁸⁰Cairns, 88.

¹⁸¹Cairns, 88.

¹⁸²Cairns, 89.

¹⁸³Andrew Cairns, Cable to London, July 31 1932, cited in Isajiw, 57.

He asserted that the crops in the middle Volga, western Siberia and Kazakhstan would be poor because of too little rainfall. And he also added that the official provisional forecast of the grain harvest, apparently made in ignorance (wilful or otherwise) of these factors was “absurdly too high”. They either did not know of or were ignoring the loss of animal draft power, which had not been replaced by tractors, and the “widespread resistance and wandering of peasants.” Cairns summarized; “Grain exports depend entirely on Government policy and urgency of need of foreign currency as the country needs all grain for food especially in view of continued acute shortage¹⁸⁴

In spite of these circumstances, Cairns still reported on substantial quantities of grain being exported. On the 12th of August he cabled London, quoting the foreign manager of the company with a monopoly on shipping grain from the USSR through the Black Sea. The company, Exportkleb, was selling grain despite having difficulty finding a buyer. Before August, 8,000 tons had been sold, and 100,000 tons were sold to the United Kingdom, very little to Italy and none to Greece between August and September. (These countries were the most common destinations for Soviet grain exports.) Despite this difficulty with finding buyers, later in 1932 one and a half million and another two million tons of grain had been exported from the Black Sea ports¹⁸⁵. Cairns’ further journeys to the agricultural districts convinced him that the Soviet Union needed famine relief rather than to seek so anxiously to export its grain.

As he spent August touring the agricultural districts of the Voronezh Oblast in the Central Black Earth region, and Stalingrad and Saratov along the lower Volga, the high food prices and obvious life of the barest subsistence that most of the locals he observed were living

¹⁸⁴Andrew Cairns, Cable to London, July 31st 1932, cited in Isajiw, 57.

¹⁸⁵Isajiw, 57.

stood in stark contrast to the members of the Soviet governing elite he frequently dined with. They ate in restaurants closed to the general public where the food was infinitely cheaper and of far superior quality than that available to the impoverished masses¹⁸⁶.

After speaking in Saratov with an agricultural professor who also agreed that the crops in regions like the Volga were especially bad, Cairns' subsequent report suggested that the United States, rather than finally recognizing the government of the Soviet Union as they were about to do, should organize another famine relief like that which they had attempted for the country in 1921 during the Russian Civil War. (This famine, which claimed an estimated five million lives, was exacerbated by a combination of the economic disruption in Russia caused by the First World War and the Civil War, and by Bolshevik policies of forcible grain requisitioning to sustain their war effort¹⁸⁷.) Cairns' suggestion was ultimately to be ignored by both the American government and British governments¹⁸⁸. With that, Cairns returned to Moscow on August 22nd, 1932, and left for London two days later. He brought with him a detailed diary on the prices and wages he encountered throughout his travels, which demonstrated that almost everywhere the price of food far exceeded the average working wage¹⁸⁹.

Agricultural labourers and low paid urban employees largely subsisted on either very small food rations from the government or none at all. Listing the prices of butter, cheese, fat pork, vegetables, grains, meat, fish, poultry, bread, eggs, sugar, milk, clothes, and restaurant meals, it was all entirely out of the reach of people who earned two or three rubles a day. His conclusion was that Stalin's plan of collectivization had imposed increasingly high grain quotas

¹⁸⁶Cairns, 105.

¹⁸⁷Norman Lowe. *Mastering Twentieth-Century Russian History*. London: Palgrave, 2002, 155.

¹⁸⁸Isajiw, 58.

¹⁸⁹Isajiw, 58.

for export over the past five years since the policy began, leaving large numbers of peasants with nothing to live upon themselves, forcing them to leave their communities in search of sustenance¹⁹⁰.

This had only worsened the situation by leaving large numbers of fields unattended to, so that by 1932 weeds and plant diseases had spread at an alarming rate, further undermining the capacity of the fields to yield any harvests of significance. Soviet officialdom, far from unaware of the investigation Cairns had done in order to come to these conclusions, denied him a visa when he attempted to return to the Soviet Union in the spring of 1933.¹⁹¹ Cairns was still fortunate that there were other individuals with whom he was associated who could themselves corroborate his findings.

It so happened that at the time Cairns was in the Soviet Union, Otto Schiller was known as the best Western analyst of Soviet agriculture. Of course, the book he wrote on the subject, *Die Krise der socialistischen Landwirtschaft in der Sowjetunion*, contained no direct references to famine, deaths, or any of his personal impressions in order to avoid being expelled by the Soviet authorities. Cairns also received an earlier draft of Schiller's book in English through the Foreign Office¹⁹². Schiller had toured Western Siberia, Kazakhstan, Crimea and Kuban himself extensively before he accompanied Cairns on his own journeys there. He told Cairns that the agricultural situation had deteriorated terribly, and that such peoples as the Kazakh herders had been forced to migrate or starve after the state forcibly seized their cattle. In the Ukraine, Schiller

¹⁹⁰Cairns, 112.

¹⁹¹Isajiw, 58.

¹⁹²Isajiw, 58.

estimated the grain and sugar-beet harvests would be already be badly affected enough by weeds and caterpillars¹⁹³.

What's more, Schiller was one of very few Western observers who were able to visit an agricultural area at the height of the famine. Cairns had only witnessed conditions in the Ukraine just as the famine was starting. Schiller reported on it on May 23rd 1933. He drove by car over 1,200 kilometers through the famine area of North Caucasus-Kuban, Stavropol and Salska. The semi-starvation he and Cairns had seen in 1932 that "caused a fall in the productivity of labour, and of morale," had now given way to severe famine¹⁹⁴. In the Kuban entire districts had been depopulated, owing in part to groups such as the Kuban Cossacks being forcibly deported for actively or passively resisting state grain collection policies. The rest were simply left to starve¹⁹⁵. In the North Caucasus, there were no deportations and consequently the number of people who were starving there was much higher, as Schiller reported. The victims were chiefly those who had not succumbed to working on the state collective farms;

"In the villages I visited, the number of deaths varied between 20-30 a day. Those still alive are enfeebled in the extreme through semi-starvation, and also by the eating of such unnatural foods as grass, roots, charred bones, dead horses, etc. And the majority will doubtless [likely] die from malaria with the on-come of the warm weather¹⁹⁶...."

Schiller estimated that the starving population could have been saved by the government "at very small expense." He calculated that up to five million people could have been fed on the exported one-and-a-half million tons of grain from the 1932 crop. In the writings he made without fear of the wrath of Soviet officials, he accused the government of deliberately ignoring a famine that was worse even than the one of 1921. He similarly accused it not only of having

Commented [g1]: Far too much here from one source.

¹⁹³Cairns, 95.

¹⁹⁴Otto Schiller, British Foreign Office document FO 371/16329, cited in Isajiw, 60.

¹⁹⁵ Otto Schiller, FO 371/16329, cited in Isajiw, 60.

¹⁹⁶Otto Schiller, British Foreign Office document FO 371/17251, cited in Isajiw, 60.

created the present agricultural crisis, but by attempting to relieve it and restore the balance between consumption and production by allowing millions to die¹⁹⁷.

Schiller's article was received in July 1933 by Laurence Collier, the head of the Foreign Office's Northern Department. Collier did nothing to bring the article to the attention of either the British government or the public at large. It was only published in the *London Daily Telegraph* in August 1933 without the author's name, and consequently did not receive comment in the Canadian press¹⁹⁸. After visiting the Urals, Schiller found such acute famine conditions that he "set his face against further tours owing to his disgust at famine conditions which are, he said, probably on a worse scale in the Urals than elsewhere." He also was said to have visited the famine areas in the Ukraine again, though the documents are not in the British archives. Schiller was quoted in August 1933 by a British Embassy official in Moscow as saying that between five and ten million died of starvation in 1932-33 alone¹⁹⁹.

In spite of the lack of response of so many officials to Cairns' reports, there were British officials who believed that it was the imperative of not just Britain, but the entirety of its empire (Canada included) to sit up and take notice of the news of how the Ukrainians and ordinary Soviet citizens as a whole were suffering under Stalin's policies. This was the observation of the British ambassador to Moscow, Sir Esmond Ovey, whose report "Conditions in Western Siberia, Kazakhstan and Certain Districts along the Volga" was sent to Sir John Simon on June 21st 1932. Sir Esmond sent out a copy of the same report that Andrew Cairns, had sent to E.M.H.

¹⁹⁷Isajiw, 60.

¹⁹⁸Isajiw, 60.

¹⁹⁹Isajiw, 60.

Lloyd on June 7 1932. Lloyd was a significant individual by virtue of his working at the Empire Marketing Board in London. In a postscript within the report, Cairns writes;

In a speech delivered in Winnipeg not long ago Mackenzie King told Western Canada that it was idle for her to think she would not meet with increasing competition from Russian and Argentine agriculture. I think he was right about Argentine, but I am afraid he has been misinformed or misled [sic] about Russia. But I must be apolitical so I should tell you about the special decorations Export Khleb (the Russian Grain Export Trust) had for the May 1st celebrations. They had a special structure on the top of their building and from it were protruding 4 card-board cannons-perhaps they had read one of Bennett's [sic] well known 1930 election speeches in which he had said he would blast Canada's way into the export markets! Bennett has a good sense of humour and as I have heard him joking about his "blasting" speech I am sure if he happens to read part of this letter he will not object to the comparison. P.P.S. Please ask McLeod to send copies of all my letters to Premiers Bracken, Anderson and Brownlee of Western Canada. I know they are all very much interested in Russian agriculture and I think they will appreciate having my observations, I have a great deal of raw material (much of it gathered in 1930 and last winter in London) for the report I intended to prepare on Russian grain growing for the Ottawa [imperial economic]Conference, but I have decided not to prepare such a report as I have not yet seen the Ukraine and other important regions, and I really think I can spend my time to better advantage wandering about the country than writing a report in Moscow.

A.C²⁰⁰.

While this segment of a report was written before Cairns was fully aware of the nature of what was happening in the Soviet Union and in the Ukraine, it demonstrates that early on he clearly believed that the governments of both Canada and Great Britain should be paying close attention to where exactly the foreign grain they were importing in such vast quantities was originating from, and how the matter should be a concern for the Empire as a whole,. At this stage, Cairns was inclined to disagree with Mackenzie King's prophetic assertion that cheap imported grain from such places as the Soviet Union would soon provide a formidable source of competition for Canadian grain producers. He echoed the statement of R.B. Bennett that Canada will force its way into foreign export markets and subsequently profit, rather than becoming the

²⁰⁰Andrew Cairns to E.M.H Lloyd, "Conditions in Western Siberia, Kazakhstan and Certain Districts Along The Volga, June 7 1932, cited in Carynnyk, 75-76..

loser in a competition with cheaper foreign imports to Canada. As Cairns acknowledges in his letter, one can see that he had yet to tour the Soviet Union extensively enough to obtain a more informed view of the competitive Soviet-Canadian agriculture trade. More important still is the evidence that Cairns was sending his reports of his Soviet travels to the premiers of the Western prairie provinces, establishing his direct ties of communication with key government figures in national agricultural production.

That there was a famine in the Ukraine even as grain from the region was entering Canada in substantial quantities was a fact apparent enough to receive ample coverage in the international media, even if it was not immediately obvious to every foreign observer the deliberate and terroristic campaign of starvation the Soviet state was inflicting on its own people. Mr. Humphrey Mitchell, M.P. of Hamilton East, Ontario, who spent several weeks in the Soviet Union (and later became the Minister of Labour under Prime Minister W.L. Mackenzie King), went on record for the Canadian Gazette of September 7th, 1933, at the same time that the famine was receiving concurrent coverage in major British newspapers. Reporting on the starvation he observed in the towns and villages of Ukraine, Mitchell said; “They did not have even the traditional dried fish and cabbage soup: they were down to bread and water, and sometimes less than that.”²⁰¹

We have seen how foreign visitors to the USSR became aware of the fact that the Ukrainian famine was being exacerbated by deliberate Soviet government action. But how did their reports filter through to the highest ranking members of the governments of Great Britain and Canada? And what was the reaction of these nations’ leaders to this disturbing information?

²⁰¹Sir Waldon Smithers to Sir John Simon, “Famine Conditions in the Soviet Union”, July 16 1934, cited in Carynnyk, 413.

Chapter 4. Canada, Britain and the Empire's Response

This chapter will look carefully at the reports in the west about the Russian famine. In Canada in particular, information about the suffering of the Ukrainians should logically only have hardened R.B. Bennett's anti-Soviet stance and further justified his plans to punish the USSR via boycott of its export. The seeming inaction of the British and Canadian governments occurred in spite of the fact that international news coverage of the famine was widespread as evidenced by the work of journalists such as Gareth Jones even as it competed with pro-Soviet disinformation in the news media. It also occurred, as shall be seen later, in spite of the fact that R.B. Bennett had originally intended to take economic action against the Soviet Union as part of his anti-communism campaign.

Before the British and Canadian governments began to contemplate a response, there were various other reports and documents that were circulated among government officials alongside the Cairns report whose contents helped substantiate Cairns' claims. Thus the issue had enough attention drawn to it where it was brought up in the British House of Commons. The Hansard for July 5 1933 records the protestations of the Duchess of Atholl, who made reference to trips to the Soviet Union and Ukraine made by observers such as the journalist Malcolm Muggeridge (and, of course, Gareth Jones) and the widespread starvation they had witnessed²⁰².

The speech made several highly relevant points. The Duchess drew attention to the news about the famine that had already reached the British public via the newspapers and the work of journalists such as Jones and Muggeridge, describing the graphic details of the suffering of

²⁰²HC Deb 05 July 1933 vol. 280 cc339-457.

ordinary citizens not just in the Ukraine but all throughout the Soviet Union. These accounts were too detailed and numerous, and the journalists who provided them had researched the matter far too deeply for them to be dismissed as nothing but the product of pure rumour or propaganda intended to besmirch the USSR for political reasons. The Duchess brought up that ordinary Soviet citizens were being deprived of the goods that the Soviet government was determined to export overseas to fill its own coffers, and that many private entrepreneurs in Britain were determined to make a profit for themselves by partaking in the trade of cheap Soviet imports. She ended by urging the British government to use the upcoming Imperial Economic Conference to advocate for the collaboration of the dominions on the creation of an impartial commission of inquiry to investigate the famine still further, ceasing the granting of loans to the Soviets until the accounts of starvation had been properly examined²⁰³.

The Duchess, a member of parliament for the Scottish Unionist Party and later a staunch opponent of Nazism and fascism, had spoken out repeatedly against Stalin's regime since the publication of her 1931 book decrying various Soviet human rights abuses, *The Conscription of a People*²⁰⁴. Her determination to advocate for the Soviet people as a whole and the Ukrainians by extension is evidenced by her forwarding copies of Otto Schiller's reports on Soviet starvation to Anthony Eden (at the time an employee of the Foreign Office and later Secretary of

²⁰³ HC Deb 05 July 1933 vol. 280 cc339-457.

²⁰⁴Richard Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany, 1933-39*, Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 235

State for Foreign Affairs²⁰⁵.) She also sent similar reports to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Sir John Simon on two separate occasions²⁰⁶²⁰⁷.

The Duchess was far from the only interested party determined to provoke government action through their personal advocacy. This can be observed by studying a letter from the leaders of the Ukrainian National Council in Canada (an organization created to protect and advance the interests and distinct ethnic identity of Ukrainians in Canada) to the British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald dated October 2, 1933, and the subsequent collection of correspondence as dialogue on the Council's request. While we have seen earlier how the Cairns report and other documents detailing the Ukrainian situation were sent to the governments of Canada and Great Britain simultaneously, this action on the part of the Ukrainian National Council demonstrates a determination to bring the attention of not just Canada but the entire British Commonwealth to the Ukrainian people's plight. This dialogue took the form of letters sent by British civil servant Laurence Collier to the British Dominions Office on November 21, 1933, and the British Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs J.H. Thomas to the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom Sir William Henry Clark on January 19, 1934. On March 2, 1934, Sir William was to finally reply to the Ukrainian National Council in Canada. The first letter sent to Ramsay MacDonald by the Ukrainian National Council provides a fairly concise summary of the nature of the state of affairs in the Ukraine;

Sir;

²⁰⁵“Conditions in Northern Caucasus in Spring of 1933.” Report by Otto Schiller, German Agricultural Attaché in Moscow, 23 May 1933. Forwarded to Anthony Eden by the Duchess of Atholl, July 1933, cited in Carynyk. 258–59, 262–63.

²⁰⁶“Conditions in the Soviet Union:” The Duchess of Atholl to Sir John Simon, 2 July 1934, Forwarding a Memorandum by Fritz Dittloff, cited in Carynyk, 399.

²⁰⁷“Famine in Soviet Union:”The Duchess of Atholl to Sir John Simon, 25 August 1934, and Sir John Simon to the Duchess of Atholl, 8 September 1934, cited in Carnnyk, 422.

We are taking the liberty of directing your attention to the deplorable fact that for a considerable time the population of Eastern Ukraine (now under a military Bolshevik occupation) are being systematically starved by the Moscow authorities. The tragedy of the great famine of 1921-22, when nearly ten million people died from hunger, is being repeated, but in all probability on a larger scale. Thousands of letters are being received in Canada continuously, containing gruesome details of the vast number dying; there are settlements in Ukraine where only one-third-sometimes only one fourth-of the original population are still alive. Crop failure is not the reason for this famine, but the brutal policy of the Moscow rulers who, needing grain for export to balance their budget, pitilessly take everything from the farmers, already proletarianized. Especially in Ukraine, where the peasants are opposed to the foreign Russian rule, are they being deprived of literally everything, being left without even the smallest ration for daily meals, under the excuse that they are hiding food. With such tactics, even a bumper crop, of huge yield, could not save these people from starvation. Having in mind the tragic plight of their compatriots, and realizing their moral duty in the matter, the Ukrainian National Council in Canada turn to you, as to a leader of a great civilized nation, with an urgent request to take the necessary steps to arrange for an immediate neutral investigation of the famine situation in Ukraine, with a view to organizing international relief for the stricken population. Any private action, even on the largest scale, would prove inadequate owing to the magnitude of the calamity. We are prepared to supply you, if necessary, with original documents and information giving details of the famine conditions. We trust that your Excellency will take this, our appeal, under most serious consideration.

We remain,

Yours faithfully,

Ukrainian National Council in Canada

President

S. Skoblak

Secretary

J.M. Boychuck

Chairman of Advisory Board

L. Biberovich²⁰⁸.

This document demonstrates that Ukrainians living in Canada who were receiving correspondence from friends and relatives in the Ukraine could be kept informed and aware of the nature of events within the Ukraine. It was apparent that their familial and cultural

²⁰⁸ The Ukrainian National Council in Canada to Ramsay MacDonald, "Famine in the Ukraine," 2 October 1933, cited in Carynyk, 339.

attachments to the famine-afflicted region compelled them to try and take their petitions to the highest authority they could think of within the British Commonwealth, rather than being content to try and get the Canadian government to make petitions to Britain on their behalf. One might wonder whether or not they trusted the Canadian government to advance their interests when the issue of trade with the USSR was brought up for the dominions to debate at the Imperial Economic Conference. In any case, with such a large number of people aware of the Ukraine's plight and trying to draw attention to it, it was entirely plausible that the government of Canada could become aware of what was happening in the Ukraine even as the Ukrainian National Council tried to gain the attention of the government of Great Britain. With a great store of knowledge on the Ukrainian experience at their disposal through Ukrainian-Canadian familial contacts, the letter they sent to Ramsay MacDonald also contained a bulletin whereby the information they had obtained on the famine was relayed in depth and in disturbing graphic detail. It was dated September 15, 1933, and contained the detailed recollections of a Ukrainian who had come to Winnipeg, Manitoba and relayed her experiences to a Ukrainian National Council Representative. A few of the more important and memorable passages are reproduced here:

“There were several cases in our district where parents have eaten their own children in a state of insanity caused by extended starvation,” said Mrs. Marie Zuk, of Kalmazovka, district Odessa, Soviet Ukraine, in a conversation with Mr. L. Biberovich, General Secretary of the U.N.C. in C. She had arrived in Winnipeg early in September, with her two small children, on her way to Consort, Alta., where her husband has been farming since his arrival in Canada in 1928, having left her native village on August 7th, 1933. “The most remarkable case of this kind happened this spring in the village of Oleshki, where a young married couple, Ivan Chuhan and his wife, killed and consumed their two small children. The gruesome crime was accidentally discovered when a pig was stolen from the Kohlosp (collective farm) and the members of the militia organized a search of all the houses in the vicinity in an endeavor to locate the stolen ‘treasure.’ Finally they found some meat of a peculiar appearance at Chulhan’s home and, pressed to the wall, the man admitted having murdered both his children in order to still the unbearable hunger. The head of the

second child was found in the oven, where it was being prepared for consumption. The couple was arrested.²⁰⁹

Besides troubling stories such as these Mrs. Zuk, as described by Biberovich of the U.N.C. in C., also had ample experience with the lack of food in the Ukraine, reporting on a severe shortage of many of the same goods which Andrew Cairns' and other observers had noted were in short supply during their travels;

“The conditions in the Ukraine were bad enough in 1930, but in 1931 they became really critical. The present situation is as follows. There is literally no bread there; no potatoes (all the seed potatoes have been eaten up); no meat, no sugar; in a word, nothing of the basic necessities of life. Last year some food was obtainable occasionally for money, but this year most of the bazaars (markets) are closed and empty. All cats and dogs disappeared, having perished or been eaten by the hungry farmers. The same is the case with the horses, so that cows are mostly used as draught-animals. People also consumed all the field mice and frogs they could obtain. The only food most of the people can afford is a simple soup prepared of water, salt, and various weeds. If somebody manages to get a cup of millet in some way, a tablespoon of it transforms the soup into a rare delicacy. This soup, eaten two or three times a day, is also the only food of the small children, as the cow or any other milk had become a mere myth. This soup has no nutritive value whatever, and people remaining on such a diet get first swollen limbs and faces, which makes them appear like some dreadful caricature of human beings, then gradually turn into living skeletons, and finally drop dead wherever they stand or go. The dead bodies are held at the morgue until they number fifty or more, and then are buried in mass graves. In the summer the burials take place more often in view of quick decomposition which cannot be checked even by a liberal use of creoline. Especially devastating is the mortality from hunger among children and elderly people.....There are many cases of suicide, mostly by hanging, among the village population, and also many mental alienations. The famine in Soviet Ukraine in 1921 was undoubtedly a terrible one, but it appears like child's play in comparison with the present situation²¹⁰.

Other aspects of these recollections affirmed the hand of the Soviet state in the creation of the famine in Ukraine and of other ways in which the death toll in the region was exacerbated;

“The village Kalamzowka was one of the more fortunate ones, but in the adjoining villages of Olshanka and Synukhin Brid the death toll defied all description. Those who were not deported to the dreaded Solovetsky Islands, or to the Ural Mountains,

²⁰⁹The Ukrainian National Council in Canada to Ramsay MacDonald, “Famine in the Ukraine,” 2 October 1933, cited in Carynnyk, 339.

²¹⁰The Ukrainian National Council in Canada to Ramsay MacDonald, “Famine in the Ukraine,” 2 October 1933, cited in Carynnyk, 339.

died from starvation, and at present not more than one quarter of the original population is living there-and they are all leading a life of misery. No word of complaint or criticism, however, is tolerate by the authorities and those guilty of the infraction of this enforced silence, disappear quickly in a mysterious way. Worst of all, there is no escape from this hell on earth, as no one can obtain permission to leave the boundaries of Ukraine, once the granary of Europe, and now a valley of tears and hunger²¹¹.”

What’s more, this account also lined up in a number of ways with the reports made by Cairns and Schiller on the economic life of the Ukraine in relation to the Soviet Union as a whole;

“In crass contrast to this terrible condition of mass death from starvation is the real condition of crops. Last year the wheat crop in our district was good, and this year it is even better still. Unfortunately the peasants derive no benefit from it, as the grain fields are watched day and night by armed guards, to prevent theft of grain ears, and after threshing the grain is immediately removed to the government storehouses, or to the nearest port There are two classes of farmers in the Ukraine. Most of them are already ‘collectivized’ and are working on the state or collective farms. A limited number still work on individual farms, but the taxes in kind, imposed on them by authorities, render their existence a permanent privation.....The only exception to this general suffering are the members of the Communist Party, and the various officials, mostly non-Ukrainians, as they receive their ‘payoks’ or rations from the government depots. As mentioned above, some food could still be had last year at the bazaars on certain occasions, but the prices were exorbitant. For instance, a pound of bread (secretly sold) used to cost 6 rubles; a pound of butter or sugar, 15 rubles; an apple, 2 rubles; a cup of millet, 3 ½ rubles; 10 onion, 2 rubles; a cup of beans, 3 rubles; etc. The prices of manufactured goods are likewise high.....What a different picture did I find in Moscow on my way to Canada! The markets there were flooded with most delicious food-stuffs! Only Ukraine seems to have been sentenced to death by starvation by the central government in Moscow²¹².”

After this report was relayed from Collier to Thomas to Clark, Clark eventually made his reply to the President of the Ukrainian National Council in Canada. His words were merely a summary and a restatement of the assertion repeated several times in that the British government

²¹¹The Ukrainian National Council in Canada to Ramsay MacDonald, “Famine in the Ukraine,” 2 October 1933, cited in Carynnyk, 339.

²¹²The Ukrainian National Council in Canada to Ramsay MacDonald, “Famine in the Ukraine,” 2 October 1933, cited in Carynnyk, 339.

apparently was in no position to impose on the government of the Soviet Union in regards to changing its policies or conduct;

Sir;

I am instructed by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to acknowledge the receipt of your communication of October 2nd last addressed Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, relative to the famine situation in Ukraine. His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom are unable to undertake any action with a view to investigating conditions in territories under the control of the Soviet Government, or to organizing relief for the inhabitants in the absence of any indication that such action would be acceptable to the Soviet Government. Mr. Thomas understands from His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs that a number of appeals for action in connection with the alleged famine in the Ukraine were, last September, addressed to the Council of the League of Nations by various Ukrainian organizations. It was then decided by members of the Council that the only course which appeared to be open to the petitioners was for them to address themselves to the International Red Cross or to some similar organization of a purely non-political character. In view of the Canadian status of your Council I am forwarding copies of your communication of this reply, to the Canadian Government.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

W.H. Clark²¹³.

This piece of correspondence confirms that the information regarding the nature of the Ukrainian famine, the stark realities of Ukrainian suffering, and the desperation of Ukrainian Canadians to draw attention to it, was relayed to the Canadian government. And yet, in the correspondence regarding international attempts to alleviate Ukrainian hunger after the height of the famine in 1934, the letter that mentions them sent by Lord Chilston in Moscow to Sir John Simon on September 8 only makes mention of relief efforts being undertaken by a non-governmental charity organization, apparently international in origin, called the "Russian Assistance Fund";

²¹³ "Famine in the Ukraine"; J.H. Thomas, Secret of State for Dominion Affairs, to Sir William Henry Clark, High Commissioner for the United Kingdom, Ottawa, 19 January 1934, and Sir William Henry Clark to the Ukrainian National Council, 2 March 1934, cited in Carynyk, 339.

“3. In the past six months the U.S.S.R. has exported 472,068 tons of grain, 123,000 tons of which went to the United Kingdom, which in addition has taken large quantities of butter, eggs, poultry, bacon and fish.

4. There may be an impression that Russia is short of grain because some shiploads from Canada and the Argentine went to Vladivostok. That, however, was merely a transport-saving arrangement and amount to only some 10,000 tons or so. As regards this year’s harvest, while there may be one or two bad spots, general report says that the harvest will not be a bad one on the whole.

5. I am not confident that all the food parcels reach their destination, and even though it is possible that the Soviet Government may put up with the scheme on account of their need of foreign exchange it is also possible that they may regard it as an insult to their powers of organization and distribution. I am tempted to ask what the organizers of the Charity Fund would say if the U.S.S.R. returned the compliment by sending parcels of food for the “starving poor” in England²¹⁴”

It is worth noting that Lord Chilston felt the need to expound further on his belief that sending grain to the Soviet Union for relief purposes is entirely unnecessary, and indeed is a slight against the Soviet regime, even if the vast quantities of food he lists as having been exported from it only served as further proof of how much food was being exported at the expense of the starving peoples of such regions as the Ukraine. It seems that he regards the sheer volumes of foodstuffs being exported as proof of the material plenty enjoyed by the Soviet people, rather than of precisely how little food was being left in the rural regions of places like the Ukraine in order for Stalin’s export quotas to be met. Of course, merely to attempt an act of charity to relieve the famine would not in and of itself have been seen as a violation of Soviet sovereignty. As we have seen already, the Soviet government had received international relief efforts for the famine of 1921-22, and in 1934 the British government would discuss the matter of famine relief with a representative of the charitable Russian Assistance Fund²¹⁵.

²¹⁴ “Famine in Soviet Union”; Lord Chilston (Moscow) to Sir John Simon. 8 September 1934, cited in Carnnyk, 425.

²¹⁵ “Famine Relief in the Ukraine.” Interview by Laurence Collier with Mrs. Ethel Christie, Russian Assistance Fund, 16 May 1934, cited in Carynyk, 384.

The example of the 1921 famine (and other incidents we shall discuss later where international action had been used in protest to human rights abuses in various countries) provided something of a precedent for a situation of this nature. This was in spite of the fact that organized humanitarian relief work as we know it today was a relatively new phenomenon at the time—one that was far from guaranteed to realize its objectives at all times. The issue here is that Lord Chilston’s scepticism as to the severity of the famine led him to believe that to attempt famine relief would be to insult the Soviets by acting as if their people were starving;

“I think the general view that no encouragement should be given to organized relief work or the sending of relief parcels or funds to the Soviet Union is sound, but no such encouragement has been contemplated. As is pointed out in the last para, of this despatch, the Soviet Govt. can always return the insult—and it is more of an insult than a serious alleviation of distress²¹⁶.”

Furthermore a note added to this document by Laurence Collier of the Dominion Office itself calls into question the assessment of the situation by Lord Chilston and his colleague (the author of the above reproduced minutes on the document) Mr. M. Vyvyan;

“This is an odd despatch. Does Lord Chilston really think that there is now no famine, or no prospect of famine, in the Soviet Union, because grain is being exported? Certainly, we have no illusions here about relief schemes for Russia; but what was interesting in the visits of Dr Amended, etc., was not their relief schemes but their information on conditions in the Ukraine, etc. Lord Chilston, however, makes no comment on that—presumably because he has no means of checking it.

L.C.

Sept. 15th²¹⁷”.

This note would suggest that several of Lord Chilston’s colleagues, who as we have seen had ample documentary evidence of starvation in the Ukraine in their possession, were

²¹⁶“Famine in Soviet Union”, Lord Chilston (Moscow) to Sir John Simon, September 8 1934, cited in Carynnyk, 425.

²¹⁷“Famion in Soviet Union”, Lord Chilston (Moscow) to Sir John Simon, September 8 1934, cited in Carynnyk, 425.

as critical of his initial reluctance to admit to the existence of the famine as he was skeptical about its existence. Certainly the fact that a civil servant as high ranking as Lord Chilston would require more convincing of the existence of the famine than several of his colleagues and subordinates demonstrates an unfortunate reality of trying to elicit a British government response to the famine. With these dispatches regarding the famine having been sent to both London and Ottawa, why was the only response to the situation that is mentioned the actions of a non-governmental charity organization? It is now a matter of looking further into precisely what responses the Commonwealth governments could have taken in this situation, and examining why no such response apparently materialized.

Chapter 5. R.B. Bennett, International Trade and the Soviet Question

Why precisely were the governments of Great Britain, Canada or any other Commonwealth nations unable or unwilling to take action against the Soviets (or at least in a manner that could have made a discernible difference?) What actions, for that matter, could they have plausibly taken to accomplish this? The documents that have been cited here would suggest some Canadian and British government knowledge of the realities of the Soviet domestic situation, and reflect the debates between government officials attempting to make sense of their contents in order to decide upon a greater course of action. During the same period in which the government of Great Britain was trying its best to not let the uncomfortable realities of Soviet domestic policy interrupt their trade with the communist regime, the government of Canada was creating its own commercial relationship with the Soviets.

On the one hand, Prime Minister R.B. Bennett had from the beginning of his term in office taken a zealously anti-communist stance. The documents from the British Foreign Office we have seen thus far demonstrate a vacillating attitude on the part of the British government as to whether they should attempt to take a definitive stance in responding to Soviet state policy. By contrast, R.B. Bennett had started his term as Prime Minister with the express intent of confronting the USSR economically as well as combatting communism at home. The fact that Bennett was unable to realize his plans, suggests that he was confronted by unavoidable political-economic realities. Most of his anti-communist action and rhetoric had been domestic in nature and primarily concerned with strident measures against the perceived activity of communist agents of the Moscow Kremlin in Canada, whose influence was frequently alleged in the activities of various left-wing labour organizations. Bennett also railed against communism at

the ideological level, as he did in a 1932 speech in Toronto reflecting his fears of communist infiltration of Canadian society;

What do they offer you in exchange for the present order? Socialism, Communism, dictatorship. They are sowing the seeds of unrest everywhere. Right in this city such propaganda is being carried on and in the little out of the way places as well. And we know that throughout Canada this propaganda is being put forward by organizations from foreign lands that seek to destroy our institutions. And we ask that every man and woman put the iron heel of ruthlessness against a thing of that kind²¹⁸.

Bennett's measures against domestic communism were suitably harsh and effective in conveying his hardline stance. He invoked the controversial Section 98 of the Criminal Code of Canada, which had originally been enacted in the aftermath of the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919. Section 98 dispensed with the presumption of innocence in outlawing the potential of threats to the state by belonging to an organization that advocated the violent overthrow of the government (as was a frequent rallying cry in the ranks of various communist parties.) The section enabled the arrest of those belonging to such organizations, spoke in their defense or distributed their literature even if they had never physically taken violent action against officialdom.

In 1931, Bennett had invoked Section 98 primarily to take punitive action against the Communist Party of Canada, and in that year eight top party leaders including prominent communist Tim Buck were arrested²¹⁹. The arrests made under this authorization caused a storm of public protest, as the act dispensed with the presumption of innocence in making arrests of those deemed to be a threat to the government. These measures in rooting out some vast subversive communist conspiracy perhaps did not have the desired effect is debatable, especially

²¹⁸Norman Penner, *Canadian Communism: The Stalin Years and Beyond*. Toronto: Methuen, 1988, 117.

²¹⁹Lorne Brown, *When Freedom Was Lost*. Montreal: Black Rose, 1987, 42.

seeing as Buck became popularly hailed as a civil libertarian hero following his release²²⁰.

Nevertheless, the fact that Bennett was so willing to court controversy by implementing these anti-communist measures demonstrated willingness to put his anti-communist rhetoric into practice.

As leader of the opposition running for the office of Prime Minister in 1930, Bennett had pledged that he would protect Canadian coal from the threat posed by competition with cheap coal from the USSR by banning Soviet imports²²¹. This ban ultimately was never implemented, but the response by some members of the public demonstrated well that many people were aware of the troubling moral implications of dealing with a regime as despotic as the USSR. A June 4 1931 letter of comment from a civilian, W. Beauregard, to minister of trade and commerce H.H. Stevens, lamented that "...the influence of the people who are bringing this bloodstained coal into Canada proved to be stronger than the will of the people²²²."

Nevertheless Bennett persisted in pursuing his anti-Soviet agenda. Early in 1931 Bennett and the American President Herbert Hoover met to discuss the creation of a front to meet the "Russian problem", and Bennett appointed the vocally anti-Soviet W.D. Herridge as minister to Washington D.C.²²³. However, Hoover's ambitious plans to punish the Soviets economically never came to fruition. Considering the persistent effort which Bennett devoted to trying to persuade the British to impose the most basic restrictions on the importation of Soviet goods, his

²²⁰Brown, 42.

²²¹David Davies, *Canada and the Soviet Experiment*. Toronto: Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Toronto, 1998, 60.

²²²Beauregard to H.H. Stevens, June 4 1931, Sessional Paper no, 442 (a), NAC microfilm C-7581, cited in Davies, 60.

²²³Davies, 61.

single-minded determination to resist the USSR at every turn distinguished him from other Western leaders by comparison.

It appears that Bennett had run for office already aware to some extent of the true nature of the Soviet regime he was so determined to oppose. The government press release following the imposition of the 1931 embargo had condemned the Soviet regime for ruthless exploitation of its workforce and forcing a standard of living on its people “below any level conceived of in Canada²²⁴.” At the 1930 Imperial Economic Conference Bennett had urged the entire Empire to confront the issue of Soviet wheat imports and Soviet timber that had taken up a quarter of the British market. He declared that Britain might benefit from excluding these commodities from its shores, just as Canada had excluded Russian anthracite coal “greatly to our advantage²²⁵.” (It is interesting here not only that Bennett seems to have been more emphatically in favour of excluding Soviet goods than the British were, but that by the time of the 1931 embargo Bennett’s apparent determination to exclude Soviet wheat specifically seems to have faltered in comparison to other commodities.)

Bennett’s highest profile action against Soviet economic influence in Canada was the creation on February 27, 1931, of an embargo on the importation of Soviet coal, woodpulp, lumber and timber, asbestos and furs. The Soviets retaliated on April 18 by forbidding their organizations or trade delegations from dealing with Canadian importing firms. Direct imports to Canada from the USSR, of which \$1, 917, 652 worth had been made in 1931, all but ceased in 1932 as a result²²⁶. At the 1932 Imperial Economic Conference the British would agree to place a

²²⁴Statement of Minister of National Revenue, February 27 1931, quoted in “Canada and Soviet Russia,” 12, cited in Davies, 62.

²²⁵Davies, 63.

²²⁶Davies, 63.

duty of two shillings per quarter (eight bushels) on foreign wheat. It would still be possible to remove the duty, however, if the price asked for Dominion wheat in Great Britain rose about the international price²²⁷.

The British refused to impose the Empire-wide embargo on Soviet timber that Bennett had pushed for, but permitted the governments of the dominions to impose temporary embargoes if they suspected they were falling victim to price manipulation by foreign governments. However, trade was still not halted completely, as exports to the USSR rose to \$539, 419 in 1933, before falling to \$104, 960 in 1934. Exports to the Soviet Union dropped to \$568, 100 in 1931 and \$55, 197 in 1932 from almost \$4 million in 1930²²⁸. For all Bennett's efforts and the fluctuations in these amounts, it was clear that substantial sums of money were on the line as the debate regarding Canada-USSR trade continued. But as we shall see later, not even the efforts of the government could not put a halt to the profits that both sides in the Canada-Soviet trade equation were drawing in.

Certainly the Canadian government had enough dispatches in its possession providing detailed information about the nature of the Soviet state, its domestic political and economic policies, and its treatment of its citizens, to justify Bennett's confrontational attitude towards the Stalinist regime. Some of the documents related to information coming out of the USSR in Ottawa's possession appealed directly to Bennett's anti-communist sensibilities, which increased the likelihood that he may have taken heed of the other documents in the file. There is a letter dated June 18, 1935, in which the Chairman of the National Civic Federation in the United States writes to Senator Arthur Capper urging him to push for aggressive action against the Soviet

²²⁷C.P. Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict, Volume 2: 1921-1948, The Mackenzie King Era*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981, 144.

²²⁸Davies, 62.

Union by the American government. The document is a prime example of the vehement anti-communism in North America that existed as the other side of the admiration many foreign observers expressed for the USSR. Entitled “Is Soviet Russia A ‘Friendly Nation’ When It Is Trying To Undermine and Destroy Our Government,” it contains the subheading; “If its criminal program is being conducted throughout the world, may not the civilized nations be compelled to join in sweeping the communists off the face of the Earth²²⁹?”

Of course the documents of the British foreign office mention how the reports they obtained from Andrew Cairns regarding the Soviet government’s deliberate starvation of its own people were sent to the Canadian government. But a quite comprehensive variety of documents on other facets of Soviet policy were also in Ottawa’s possession. That Bennett would have such literature in his possession would suggest that he was already prepared to believe the worst about the Soviet Union.

Some of these documents were even more direct than the Cairns report in drawing attention to the artificially created nature of the Ukrainian famine. A pamphlet among Bennett’s entitled the “Ukrainian Bureau Bulletin” was issued by the aforementioned Ukrainian Bureau based in London, England. The Bureau was an advocacy group created to represent the interests of Ukrainian expatriates living in the United Kingdom. This organization issued a bulletin on the state of Ukraine with information obtained apparently from British government sources.

Admittedly, it was precisely the sort of organization devoted to the promotion of Ukrainian nationalism and ethnic interests that Bennett, along with the RCMP, had regarded with suspicion for potential disloyalty. The existence documents do not make it clear as to whether or not he

²²⁹The National Civic Federation, New York City, “Is Soviet Russia A ‘Friendly Nation’ When It Is Trying To Undermine and Destroy Our Government?”, June 18, 1935, Library and Archives Canada, Richard Bedford Bennett, *Reports - Ussr 1930 - 1935* MG26-K.[Ottawa, Ontario].

responded to their entreaties with cynicism, but his later conduct would suggest that the pamphlet's contents confirmed many of his suspicions regarding the oppressive nature of Stalin's regime.

The issue in question, dated June 1934, covered the period immediately after the worst of the Holodomor had passed and situated the famine in the context of Ukraine's desire to extricate itself from Soviet Russian influence and domination. The pamphlet affirms that the brief period of Ukrainian semi-autonomy that occurred under the rule of Lenin was followed under Stalin by "...the period through which Ukraine is now passing, a period of suppression and liquidation of Ukrainian culture and aspirations²³⁰."

The pamphlet stresses the imperative of the Soviets to clamp down on the threat of Ukrainian independence, asserting that "Ukraine, besides being the granary of Russia, is teeming with coal, iron, and other raw materials, and without Ukraine the Soviet Union would be of no account." The pamphlet provides a rather accurate summary of the same conclusions drawn by the Cairns reports; namely, that the famine was due to a combination of deliberate malice and Soviet ineptitude towards Soviet agriculture;

"Unrest in Ukraine is increased by the collapse of the Soviet agricultural policy, to which attention has constantly been drawn in these bulletins. The revolt of the peasants in Ukraine resulting from forcible collectivization of farms, the compulsory collections of grain and the exile of hundreds of thousands to forced labour camps in Siberia and elsewhere, to say nothing of the actual death by starvation of men, women and children, for which a moderate estimate of five million has been given, is a serious menace to the Soviet Union.....The facts regarding the situation in Ukraine are confirmed by evidence from many sources, whether from official Soviet sources, or by the direct evidence of independent eye-witnesses or by the experiences of innumerable Relief Committees²³¹."

²³⁰Library and Archives Canada, "Ukrainian Bureau Bulletin", June, 1934, pg. 2-3, Bennett, Richard Bedford Reports - *Ussr 1930 - 1935* MG26-K. [Ottawa, Ontario].

²³¹Library and Archives Canada, "Ukrainian Bureau Bulletin", June, 1934, pg. 2-3, Bennett, Richard Bedford Reports - *Ussr 1930 - 1935* MG26-K. [Ottawa, Ontario].

The pamphlet includes the testimony of survivors and witnesses who had managed to escape the country, even if it does not reveal their names. It would be hard to dismiss these accounts as merely a lurid fabrication when compared with the sheer volume of similar experiences that were to be relayed by survivors and their relatives to those outside the Soviet Union. One might wonder, however, if with instances like the factually dubious accounts that mingled with the real life atrocities of the Germans in Belgium in the First World War in mind, the officials might have regarded these documented horrors with subsequent scepticism.;

“One fugitive, named -----, from the village of Shestakivci, on the Soviet Bank opposite Zalissia on the Galician Bank, escaped two months ago. He stated “All of us suffered from starvation, we ate beetroot and other green stuffs which made us very ill. From Easter until the new harvest everyone will suffer from famine, even the Kolhosp members.....As Charles Hazlitt Cahana result of hunger and from bad food, people swell, feel ill and die. In places further from the border it is still worse. We have been told that in the vicinity of Bila Tserkva only a third of the population remaind. Near Dunaivka there are villages where all the people have died. Not long ago a peasant from the village of Vitkivtsi escaped and said that one-third of the people have died. In the Kiev district they say that cannibalism has occurred. The government gives no assistance. They take everything that is gathered from the fields. People from the Kamenetz district told him that the same thing prevails in their district. People ate all the cats and dogs and they said there have been cases where children have been eaten²³².”

The pamphlet also makes reference to the journalists whose reports on the starvation in the Ukraine were intended to contradict the high level of disinformation that pervaded the international journalistic community regarding the subject;

“Soviet propagandists continue to chant their song about the bumper harvest which they allege has just been garnered, and whilst they all last year strenuously denied the existence of famine they are now prepared to admit a severe shortage last year but pretend all is well now. The Moscow correspondent of the Manchester Guardian, in the issue of April 2nd, 1934, explains very clearly how little reliance should be placed on statistics purporting to give the number of millions of tons of grain in Russia’s bulging corn bins. The Moscow correspondent concludes by saying that even if the crop of 1933 is a slight improvement on that of 1932, which led to a ghastly widespread

²³² Library and Archives Canada, “Ukrainian Bureau Bulletin”, June, 1934, pg. 4, Bennett, Richard Bedford Reports - Ussr 1930 - 1935 MG26-K. [Ottawa, Ontario].

famine; nevertheless there has as yet been no abolition of rationing restrictions. This is confirmed by the *Economist*, March 31st, and the *Observer*, March 11th, in very carefully prepared articles²³³.”

The pamphlet also details the most public way in which Ukrainians living in Canada could have tried to draw the public’s attention to the issue: a debate in the Ottawa House of Commons on February 5th 1934, and a speech by the M.P for Vegreville, Alberta, Michael Luchovich. Luchovich mentions Ukrainian famine as having occurred “in what was formerly the richest, the happiest and the most fertile part of Russia.” He made mention of demonstration and protest meetings against the state of hunger still existing in the Ukraine that were staged in New York City and Boston among other places in 1933. Luchovich also asserted that hundreds of resolutions imploring that action be taken were sent to both the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Canada, and during the debate he read extracts from the letters of numerous famine witnesses and survivors²³⁴.

These pamphlets’ graphic descriptions of the various forms of oppression endured by enemies of the Soviet state can only have affirmed Bennett’s pre-existing beliefs, and one might think, increase the resolve of his anti-Soviet campaign. Certainly the government had access to ample information to confirm the brutally totalitarian nature of Soviet rule. The documents in the R.B. Bennett collection from the National Archives also contain extended passages from the article “Life in Concentration Camps in the U.S.S.R.,” in which the Soviet gulags created to imprison enemies of the state were described in great detail by gulag escapee Professor Vladimir Chernavin, who escaped from the gulags in 1932 after two years imprisonment. Chernavin’s initial assessment that at least 1,300,000 Soviet citizens are imprisoned in gulags (administered

²³³Library and Archives Canada, “Ukrainian Bureau Bulletin”, June, 1934, pg. 5, Bennett, Richard Bedford Reports - Ussr 1930 - 1935 MG26-K. [Ottawa, Ontario].

²³⁴Library and Archives Canada, “Ukrainian Bureau Bulletin”, June, 1934, pg. 6, Bennett, Richard Bedford Reports - Ussr 1930 - 1935 MG26-K. [Ottawa, Ontario].

by the secret police the OGPU) is soon after dismissed by himself as being an extremely conservative estimate based on the portion of the data that the Soviet government was willing to release²³⁵.

His description of life in the camps would provide a very clear demonstration of the sort of treatment the regime was capable of dispensing to its enemies. They were the sort of descriptions that could render all too plausible the numerous accounts of the people of Ukraine and elsewhere being slowly and deliberately starved to death at the Soviet leadership's capricious whims, such as Chernavin's relating of the different punishments dispensed to recalcitrant inmates;

“In the winter they “put him out in the cold,” that is, stripped him naked and put him on the stump of a tree. As in this latitude the winter temperature is seldom higher than 10 degrees C., the stripped man soon loses consciousness and dies: or else his arms and legs are frozen, after which he dies of gangrene. In the summer they “put him to the mosquitos,” that is, they stripped him and tied him to a tree. In the northern forests there is such a mass of mosquitos that they bit to death even beasts covered with as thick a skin as cattle; of course a man could not endure this and died. Besides this, they beat them terribly at their work, and many were put in the punishment cell where they died of cold and starvation. Thus the OGPU quickly got rid of prisoners who could stand the heavy work.....[Sometimes] the warder would order the prisoner to bring him something out of the wood and as soon as he was fifty yards away, would shoot him in the back. Then a document would be drawn up saying that the prisoner was shot “in an attempt to escape.” The prisoner could not disobey and refuse to go in to the forest, as then they would kill him for disobedience²³⁶.”

Equally important were the documents in the government's possession which should have made clear exactly what economic course the Soviet Union was bound to take, and what the natural consequences of its economic policies would be, just as the Five Year Plans and collectivization were under way. This was the pamphlet issued on November 1st 1930 from *The*

²³⁵Library and Archives Canada, Vladimir Chernavin, “Life in Concentration Camps in the USSR”, Slavonic Review, 1934, Richard Bedford Bennett *Reports - Ussr 1930 - 1935* MG26-K.[Ottawa. Ontario], 1.

²³⁶Library and Archives Canada, Vladimir Chernavin, “Life in Concentration Camps in the USSR”, Slavonic Review, 1934, Richard Bedford Bennett *Reports - Ussr 1930 - 1935* MG26-K.[Ottawa. Ontario], 6-7.

Economist, entitled “An Impression of Russia,” in which various experts associated with the magazine and foreign observers visiting the country wrote on various aspects of the Soviet Union’s domestic and foreign economic policies, devoting equal space to collectivization and the Five Year Plans respectively.

In addition to plenty of facts and figures regarding specific exports and government policies, the pamphlet drew attention to serious flaws in the system of collectivized agriculture. “The Lack of Real Surplus” outlined how the Soviet government’s fanatical desire to reach increasingly higher export quotas to maximize the amount of foodstuffs exported and the subsequent profits for the state was leaving the Soviet population with increasingly little food for themselves as so much of it was being seized by the government for export. Other chapters took note of the dissatisfaction of kulaks at the attempts of the government to obtain their grain and livestock at deflated prices, and their general resistance to being forced into the system of collective farming. While these articles did not mention mass starvation, they outlined the background factors that would contribute to famine in such places as the Ukraine, and the factors that were to precede the deliberately aggressive actions of an angered and frustrated Soviet state against the kulaks it regarded as counter-revolutionary forces out to deliberately obstruct its economic goals²³⁷.

Bennett also had access to ample information regarding the precise date of the trade between the Soviet Union and Canada, as well as the Soviets’ trade with the rest of the British Empire. This information was summarized for Bennett in a pamphlet (with no author and stamped with “Secret”) entitled “Canada and Soviet Trade,” full of data compiled by government

²³⁷Library and Archives Canada, “An Impression of Russia”, *The Economist*, London, 1930, Bennett, Richard Bedford *Reports - Ussr 1930 - 1935* MG26-K.[Ottawa. Ontario], 37.

employees. The pamphlet, though the year of its printing is unspecified, discusses the years 1927 to 1931. It began by warning that as a centralized state-driven command economy, the USSR acted “without regard to those economic considerations which determine the export business of capitalist countries. Russian exports are state controlled and state directed and can be forced in such a way as to make competition impossible²³⁸.” The Soviet government had its sights set squarely on the revenue to be gained from exports used to finance the development projects designed by the state, revenue which was required to be in vast quantity, which the state was prepared to resort to just about any tactic to acquire. In 1929, the Soviet State Planning Commissioners had declared that the decrease in foreign credits brought in from their exports had forced them to increase exports of goods they claimed they would otherwise have kept at home²³⁹.

There were coherent reasons for the Soviets to put low prices on such products as wheat that they exported overseas. On 21 October 1930, the Moscow newspaper *Isvestiya* had declared that “We have been forcing our exports to increase and strengthen the importation of the prime necessities for the industrialization of our country²⁴⁰.” That was true as much as the more discreet agenda of violence against the “counterrevolutionary” classes in Soviet society, but the statement added to the fears of those who maintained that flooding foreign markets with their exports was a stated Soviet agenda. The pamphlet summarized, after presenting the quotation from the article, that:

²³⁸Library and Archives Canada, “Canada and Soviet Trade”, R.B. Bennett Papers M1176 UNB 98. [Ottawa. Ontario], 2.

²³⁹Library and Archives Canada, “Canada and Soviet Trade”, R.B. Bennett Papers M1176 UNB 98. [Ottawa. Ontario], 2. (Interestingly this statement coincided with the early beginnings of the program of state collectivization of agriculture which had been undertaken with the intent of bringing state punishment down upon the kulak class.)

²⁴⁰Library and Archives Canada, “Canada and Soviet Trade”, R.B. Bennett Papers M1176 UNB 98. [Ottawa. Ontario], 8.

“It would appear, then, that the Canadian government were convinced that the combination of necessity with a state monopoly of all foreign trade permitted the Soviet government to export at prices regardless of cost, and also directly manipulate its foreign trade for political purposes in such a way as to make competition, on the part of those states whose trade was organized on a capitalistic and individualistic basis, impossible²⁴¹.”

The pamphlet also took care to emphasize what the government of Canada was already aware of—that the Soviet regime relied on the forced labour of imprisoned enemies of the state to keep a significant portion of its export industry functioning, a fact that Bennett was all too glad to seize upon. But it also took great pains to examine the Soviet policy of dumping of goods in foreign markets.

Defining “dumping” as “sales for export at lower prices than those charged at the same time under like circumstances to buyers from the same market,” the pamphlet mentioned that it was difficult to apply the definition to the USSR because prices in the Soviet market were not uniform and that there may have been two or three prices for the same commodity at the same time depending on the channels through which the goods were purchased. These prices in the Soviet case were set and determined by the central government²⁴². The pamphlet pointed out that the prices of commodities in the USSR were likely to have been lowered artificially by the state policy of expropriation of capital²⁴³.

The third criteria for dumping that was mentioned was that the product in question be sold for less than the world market price, which of course the Soviet government denied on the grounds that they would have to make their exports cheaper than those of the rest of the world in order to ensure the Five Year Plans would receive their funding. The pamphlet even accused the

²⁴¹ Library and Archives Canada, “Canada and Soviet Trade”, 8.

²⁴² Library and Archives Canada, “Canada and Soviet Trade”, 8.

²⁴³ Library and Archives Canada, “Canada and Soviet Trade”, 9..

Soviets of going so far as to make their dumping policy predatory in order to gain dominance of world markets, although this was far more ambitious than Stalin's policies (which were focused primarily on the strengthening of the Soviet economy in the face of hostile Western interests) were intended to accomplish²⁴⁴.

The author of the pamphlet also posited the theory that the Soviets had sold their wheat internationally at such cheap prices to highlight the agricultural abundance with which collectivization had supposedly blessed their nation. While it would be the policy of Bennett to agitate for increased economic restrictions against Soviet imports, the pamphlet made the recommendation that negotiating directly with the Soviet government to adjust the price on their exports such as wheat, or urging the British government to help with incentivizing the trade of Empire-produced goods (as would be the focus of the discussion at the Imperial Economic Conference in 1932-33) was a more realistic plan than trying to keep Soviet imports out of Canada entirely²⁴⁵. To put into perspective the reluctance of the British to cease their economic dealings with the USSR entirely, especially regarding agriculture, the pamphlet pointed out that the United Kingdom had imported 21.7% of its foreign wheat directly from the USSR in 1931. In 1931 Canada's share of the market for wheat imported to the United Kingdom had dropped to 25.12%, a reality which the pamphlet blamed on Soviet imports. In regards to the Soviet wheat question, it offered this summation;

“Heavy Soviet imports of wheat may not often materialize as long as Soviet Russia remains an uncertain factor in the general wheat situation. Many believe Russia is likely to be an important factor in the world's wheat supply only in the years in which exceptionally large crops are harvested in the country. It has already been

²⁴⁴Library and Archives Canada, “Canada and Soviet Trade”, 10.

²⁴⁵Library and Archives Canada, “Canada and Soviet Trade”, 12.

demonstrated, however, that the influence of the Russian supply in a good year can be very disturbing²⁴⁶.”

The pamphlet also highlighted the concerns of Canada’s leadership that Britain’s trade with the Soviet Union was depriving Canada of a market for its exports as much as Soviet exports in Canada were competing with domestic production of various goods of which wheat was only one. It noted that the British were buying three times as many goods from the Soviet Union as they were exporting to it, purchasing with cash and selling on credits with which the Soviets would be able to purchase goods from the United States and Germany²⁴⁷. Despite these concerns, as the pamphlet reminds the reader the embargo on Soviet imports implemented by the Canadian government was only a partial one that did not completely break off Canada-Soviet commercial relations. There was no indication that any restrictions had been applied to Soviet grain, wheat or other agricultural products. The Soviets retaliated by forbidding (at least temporarily) the placing of orders for any Canadian goods or the use of Canadian ships by Soviet importing organizations or trade delegations²⁴⁸. The British, meanwhile, struggled to maintain the trade agreement they had signed with the USSR in 1921²⁴⁹.

This literature would certainly have done much to convince Bennett that cutting off trade with the USSR would have done a substantial blow to Stalin’s plans for rapid industrialization (while simultaneously pointing out Canada’s troubling reliance on trade with the USSR for revenue.) Whether Bennett would have success in confronting international communism as represented by the Soviet Union through international diplomacy and economic action was

²⁴⁶Library and Archives Canada, “Canada and Soviet Trade”, R.B. Bennett Papers M1176 UNB 98. [Ottawa. Ontario], 13.

²⁴⁷Library and Archives Canada, “Canada and Soviet Trade”, R.B. Bennett Papers M1176 UNB 98. [Ottawa. Ontario], 15.

²⁴⁸Andrew J. Williams, *Trading With The Bolsheviks*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992, 187.

²⁴⁹M.V. Glenny, “The Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement, March 1921”. *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 5, No. 2. (1970), 63-82.

another matter entirely -- and, as would soon become apparent, it was a considerably more difficult undertaking.

Andrew Williams' book *Trading with the Bolsheviks* is a highly invaluable source of information on the trade relationship between Canada and the USSR in the 1920s and 30s. Williams looks to contemporary news sources, government documents and correspondence between heads of state to reconstruct this period. The information presented lines up with what other public discourse from the period demonstrated--namely, that concerns over the welfare of Canada's economy and other commercial concerns heightened the controversy of trading with the Soviet Union.

Bennett's Order in Council demonstrates that it was possible for the government to take action in the face of Stalin's excesses. This was perhaps just as well, as under the Bennett government the more conventional methods reserved for dealing with a dispute with a foreign power were somewhat hampered by his preferred method of personal governance. Under ordinary circumstances the most effective way of dealing directly with the Soviet Union would have been through the Department of External Affairs. However, Bennett was distinguished by opposition to the idea of diplomatic missions, on the grounds that they supposedly weakened imperial unity. This made him sceptical of the very motives that had originally led to the creation of the foreign service²⁵⁰. Bennett expressed a desire that the department's size and funding be reduced in the name of his platform of economy in government, and furthermore he believed that Canada should be represented overseas by the trade commissioner service²⁵¹.

²⁵⁰John Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs, Volume 1: The Early Years, 1909-1946*. Montreal: The Institute of Public Administration of Canada, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990, 135.

²⁵¹Hilliker, 136.

Bennett's desire to significantly curtail government expenditure and focus external policy on foreign economic relations was of course justified to some extent by the Depression, and the imperative to address the matters of unemployment, poverty and dwindling exports²⁵². Additionally, Bennett was known for his disinclination to share responsibility or delegate work to subordinates, and he made himself the final arbiter of matters that were the responsibility of both himself and his ministers²⁵³. His tensions with the Department of External Affairs coloured his relationship with the Under Secretary of State (and one of the Department's most prominent architects) Oscar Douglas Skelton. Skelton was a figure of whom Bennett harboured considerable frustration (often declaring "I'll fire him next week²⁵⁴"), but one who nevertheless remained devoted in his service to the Prime Minister.

His and Bennett's respective agendas alternatively seemed to contradict and complement each other. For example, while both of them had been in favour of using the 1930 and 1931 Imperial Economic Conferences to advocate for Canada's increased economic and political autonomy beyond Britain's traditional primacy, Skelton was frustrated by Bennett's belief that Canada and Britain should continue to be closely united by a notion of Imperial solidarity²⁵⁵. As we shall see, this ongoing political conflict over whether Canada should rely more heavily on its own initiative or on the Empire's support to deal with larger questions of economic policy would prove detrimental to Bennett's plan to confront the USSR. It did not help matters that Skelton would later oppose Bennett's embargo on Soviet imports in favour of "a more responsible

²⁵²Hilliker, 136.

²⁵³Hilliker, 137.

²⁵⁴Norman Hillmer, *O.D. Skelton: A Portrait Of Canadian Ambition*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015, 188.

²⁵⁵Hillmer, 188.

foreign policy²⁵⁶ . . .”, apparently believing (and perhaps accurately so) that the Soviets would only become confrontational in response to this policy.

With this information in mind, it is unsurprising that so little of the work of dealing with the Soviets in this period appears to have been done by professional diplomats and foreign policy intermediaries (even considering the lack of a Canadian embassy in Russia), or that so few in the government appeared capable of operating contrary to the Prime Minister’s will. The restraints on its activities the Department of External Affairs must have endured as a result of Bennett’s policies may explain why in John Hilliker’s book “Canada’s Department of External Affairs, Volume 1: The Early Years, 1909-1946”, there are a total of only six passing references to the Soviet Union mentioned in the index²⁵⁷.

Despite the fact that Bennett’s governing style made conventional diplomacy with the Soviets somewhat difficult to undertake, there were still ways for the international community to take action in the face of crimes against humanity committed by individual governments, and several cases in recent history where such actions had a precedent. For example, in the late 1890s and early 1900s, international criticism of the atrocities perpetrated in the Congo Free State under the colonial administration of King Leopold II of Belgium resulted in the Belgian parliament responding to international pressures by voting to wrest control of the colony from the monarch²⁵⁸.

At the outbreak of the First World War, when Belgium was invaded by the Germans in 1914, the Imperial German Army inflicted a campaign of mass murders of civilians and

²⁵⁶Hillmer, 193.

²⁵⁷Hilliker, 402.

²⁵⁸Robert Harms, “The End of Red Rubber: A Reassessment.” *The Journal of African History* 16, 1975.

destruction of major cities that came to be infamously dubbed the “Rape of Belgium” by the Allied press. In response to these atrocities that left vast numbers of Belgian civilians displaced, the British government committed to taking in between 225,000 and 265,000 Belgian refugees²⁵⁹. The Commission for Relief in Belgium was established the same year in the United States by future president Herbert Hoover, with the intention of shipping foodstuffs to Belgium to counteract the shortage of food caused by German requisitioning. By the war’s end the organization had brought food to an estimated, 11,000,000 Belgians²⁶⁰. (Hoover’s prior experience with involving in a relief organization raises the question, however, as to why he did not advocate more strongly in favour of such action in the face of Stalin’s crimes against his own people when he later joined R.B. Bennett in calling for the international rebuke of the USSR.)

Other Americans also took advantage of their country’s then-neutrality during the war to respond to other catastrophes in a similar fashion. In 1915, the American ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau Sr, submitted extensive reports detailing the atrocities being inflicted on the people of Armenia by their Ottoman rulers, an attempt at wiping them out wholesale in a manner that in subsequent decades would receive the technical classification of genocide. In response to his report, the Near East Foundation was established by American philanthropists looking to provide relief for Armenian refugees²⁶¹. By 1919 the Committee had received \$100 million in donations from all across the United States (thanks to an extensive awareness campaign) which was wired directly to Ambassador Morgenthau for distribution²⁶². Though the circumstances in these cases were far from identical, incidents such as these were a

²⁵⁹Peter Calahan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*. Garland Publishing, New York, 1982, 2.

²⁶⁰George I. Gay, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, Vol. 2. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1929.

²⁶¹Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith and Fantasy: America in the Middle East 1776 to the Present*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2007, 333.

²⁶²Oren, 336.

prime example of how action could be taken by neutral third parties to aid the suffering victims of despotic regimes, through the work of active representatives in hostile territory and through the awareness and philanthropy of the citizens of democratic nations. While a goodly portion of this humanitarian work had been done by organizations in the United States who exploited the neutral status in the First World War their country enjoyed until 1917, their work provided a compelling example of the potential successes of activism by non-government organizations (such as those which we shall see later discussed the possibility of aiding the Ukraine with the British government. That the relief organizations which attempted to bring aid to the Ukraine were, as we have already seen, denied passage within the Ukraine by the Soviets had perhaps yet to become widely known. Given the volume of reports the Allied countries had received during the First World War of the suffering of both the Belgians and the Armenians, one might wonder whether dealing with the onslaught of news about Ukrainian starvation had left the public in these nations fatigued with the memory of similar large scale humanitarian crises.)

By the end of the First World War, however, the victorious Allied powers now had an organization which theoretically should have made the task of holding governments to account for their actions much easier. This was the League of Nations, an organization which Canada itself had been instrumental in creating. As one of the dominions together with Britain that contributed to the creation of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, Canada was one of the League of Nations' founding member states²⁶³. The League had been founded on high ideals of the promotion of peace between the nations of the world and the global protection of human rights, such as the 1926 convention where its member nations vowed to put an end to the remnants of

²⁶³F.S. Northedge. *The League of Nations: Its Life and Times, 1920-1946*. Teaneck, N.J.:Holmes and Meier, 1986, 35.

the international slave trade²⁶⁴. It was also intended to serve the purpose of rebuking those regimes that could be perceived as threatening these goals either through abusing the rights of their subjects or directing their aggression at their neighbours.

While unfortunately the League was to become infamous for its ineffectual resistance to the territorial expansion of various militaristic dictatorships in the years preceding the Second World War, several times it nonetheless demonstrated the ways by which the international community could protest the actions of “rogue” governments. Notable significant incidents such as these occurred at approximately the same time that R.B. Bennett’s government was struggling to take action to protest against the government of the Soviet Union. In 1931, the Empire of Japan used the pretext of sabotage on the South Manchurian Railway (in actuality carried out by the Japanese Kwangtung Army in secret) to invade and subsequently annex the Chinese region of Manchuria. The League of Nations assembled several delegates into the Lytton Commission, which after travelling to the region asserted that Japan was the aggressor²⁶⁵. After the Lytton Report demanding the Japanese evacuate Manchuria was passed successfully in the League Assembly in 1933, the Japanese responded instead by withdrawing from the League²⁶⁶.

Despite the ineffectual nature of these protests against acts of clear aggression, they nevertheless demonstrated that it was possible for the League of Nations to register formal protest against objectionable actions by national governments. When the Soviet Union was admitted to the League on September 18, 1934, as the British and Canadians continued to debate their response to the Soviets in the wake of the Ukrainian famine, another window of opportunity

²⁶⁴*League of Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 60, pp. 254–270.

²⁶⁵“Lytton Report”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, February 16 1933.

²⁶⁶Meirion and Susie Harries. *Soldiers of the Sun: The Rise and Fall of the Imperial Japanese Army*. New York: Random House, 1991, 161.

had theoretically opened up to at least attempt to call Stalin's regime to account²⁶⁷. Attending the League's meeting in Geneva in Fall 1934, R.B. Bennett himself had reluctantly signed the multinational telegram that had beseeched the Soviets to accept membership in the League²⁶⁸. Skelton's speech at the Sixth Committee of the League Assembly on September 18 1934 stated that open dialogue with the USSR was essential, despite the fact that its leaders did not adhere to democratic principles. (This was justified by Skelton reminding the Committee that not all League members adhered universally to these principles themselves²⁶⁹.)

Bennett's declaration in private had been that that the Canadian delegation's purpose in Geneva must be to "take a whack at the Rooshians²⁷⁰". In his speech to the Committee Skelton acknowledged "the apprehension felt by many thousands in Canada who have relatives and friends in Russia as to the continuance of the sufferings and the famine which were reported in many districts of the Soviet Union last year and on previous occasions²⁷¹."

However, he also declared his belief that Stalin's regime would "be prepared to do what is possible to relieve distress and will be prepared to sanction any assistance, devoid of political bias which individual citizens of any other Member of the League might desire to tender to those in distress, just as similar sanction would be given reciprocally²⁷²." This statement raises the question, if Skelton did indeed see the same reports as Bennett describing the famine, whether or

²⁶⁷ United Nations, *League of Nations Chronology*.
[http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/\(httpAssets\)/3DA94AAFE9E8E76C1256F340047BB52/\\$file/sdn_chronology.pdf](http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/(httpAssets)/3DA94AAFE9E8E76C1256F340047BB52/$file/sdn_chronology.pdf)

²⁶⁸Hillmer, 193.

²⁶⁹"Report of the Canadian Delegates To The Fifteenth Assembly of the League of Nations (Ottawa, 1935), 21 -2, Speech of ODS At the Sixth Committee of the League Assembly, 18 September 1934, cited in Norman Hillmer, *O.D. Skelton: The Work of the World, 1923-1941*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013, 264.

²⁷⁰C, SP, Vol. 4, File 18, "Extracts from Handwritten Letters, ODS to Isabel Skelton, 16 and 18 September 1934", cited in Hillmer, 263.

²⁷¹Hillmer, 264.

²⁷²Hillmer, 264.

not he himself came to the conclusion that the famine's origins were in deliberate action by the Soviet regime. In any case, his apparent belief that Stalin's Kremlin would itself take action to alleviate the suffering was to prove to be entirely wishful thinking.

This failure to take action regarding the famine in the presence of League members was made surprising by the fact that this was not the first instance in which the Canadian government had been compelled to confront Soviet state crimes. On October 11, 1930 H.J. Seymour, the head of the British Foreign Office's Northern Department (which dealt with the USSR) had sent a letter to Canada's Secretary of State Charles Hazlitt Cahan. Seymour said that the Foreign Office had received a request from the Reverend David Toews of the Mennonite Church in Canada to provide assistance for an estimated eighty thousand Russian Mennonites. The Reverend had said that reports presented at a Mennonite conference in Danzig, Poland claimed that twenty-five thousand Russian Mennonites had been sent to Stalin's Siberian gulags as forced labourers, and that twenty thousand out of them had perished from cold and starvation. Whether or not these exact numbers could be proven was not clear, but the Reverend Toews had hoped to bring the attention of foreign governments and the Red Cross to the matter in the hopes that external pressure might be imposed on the Stalinist regime²⁷³.

On December 10, O.D. Skelton replied. In would set an unfortunate precedent for dealing with the plight of the Ukrainians, he asserted that Canada's immigration policy prioritized either Mennonites who were joining their family members in Canada or who had sufficient capital to establish themselves on the land, and that since regulations made by the Soviet government

²⁷³British Foreign Secretary to British Ambassador in Soviet Union, London, October 11, 1930, Despatch 1147, cited in *Documents on Canadian External Relations, Volume 4: 1926-1930*. Ottawa: Department of External Affairs, 1971, 1020.

forbid major quantities of capital from leaving the USSR, any Mennonites who Canada admitted would be unable to meet this second requirement²⁷⁴.

Even though Canada lacked an embassy in the USSR (which it would not acquire until 1941²⁷⁵) as a member of the League and of the British Commonwealth, it still possessed the ability to use the League to register formal protest against the Soviets. As it turned out, there were pragmatic reasons why such policies never manifested themselves in any meaningful way. Furthermore, by the time the Ukrainian Bureau had issued its pamphlet in 1934, the international community at large had already discovered that tough economic action against the Soviet Union was a far more difficult proposition to enact in practice than in theory.

In regards to imports of Soviet wheat, the government's attitude would soon begin to shift. O.D. Skelton, Bennett's Under-Secretary of State inherited from the previous Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, remained convinced that the Soviet Union in its new, rapidly industrializing state still possessed a wealth of trade possibilities for Canada²⁷⁶. Despite the creation of the Statute of Westminster in 1931 that effectively granted autonomy to the British Empire's dominions, this was still a period in which Canada was unsure as to how its foreign policy should function.

Canada's status as an international actor in its own right was not yet clear to either Canada itself or Britain. It was widely maintained in British government circles that the Dominion Office in London was a "second rate" ministry, because it was taken for granted that Britain would have the support of its dominions in major matters of foreign policy²⁷⁷. The

²⁷⁴Secretary of State for External Affairs to Dominions Secretary, Ottawa, December 10, 1930, Despatch 435, *Documents on Canadian External Relations, Volume 4*, 1021.

²⁷⁵"Canada at War: EXTERNAL AFFAIRS: Northern Neighbors". *Time*, Monday, June 5, 1944.

²⁷⁶Williams, 187.

²⁷⁷Williams, 187.

assumption was that even with the increased independence granted to the dominions by the Statute of Westminster, it would be loyalty to Britain and the strength of Canada's cultural bond to Britain that would compel them to act in unison. The increasingly attractive possibility of trade with the Soviets at least alerted Canadians to the idea that as a nation they might possess interests of their own independent of Britain, even if in this case the desire to trade in Soviet goods overlapped with Britain's own economic interests. In July 1922, the government of Canada had recognized the new Soviet state and its own government as a de facto consequences of the 1921 Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement²⁷⁸.

The fact remained that if Bennett intended to confront the USSR, there was the matter of the extensive Canada-Soviet trade relationship that had developed approximately within the previous decade to consider. After A. Yazikoff was accepted by the British as Soviet trade representative (or "official Soviet agent") in March 1924, a Canadian Trade Commissioner, Dana Leolyn Wilgress, was attached to the British mission in Moscow. At the international Genoa economic conference of 1922, the Canadian representatives in attendance were told that their function was "not actively to intervene in questions that are of purely European concern, but that you should interest yourselves in such questions as are of economic concern to Canada²⁷⁹." Despite the growing and developing sense of autonomous nationhood that Canadians were beginning to experience after the First World War, the conference suggested that in this period the international community still regarded Canada as a mere annex to British concerns, and therefore unlikely to differ significantly from the British in terms of foreign policy and trade.

²⁷⁸Williams, 187.

²⁷⁹Williams, 187.

Following the appointment of Wilgress to the mission in Moscow in 1924 (though according to Department of External Affairs documents Canadian representation had been attached to the British trade delegation there as early as 1921²⁸⁰), undersecretary of state for Foreign Affairs Oscar Douglas Skelton began emphasizing to Prime Minister King that good relations with the USSR were desirable in order to preserve the peace of Europe and to limit potential “seditious” activity by Soviet agents in Canada. He also asserted that “a number of Canadian firms anticipate a chance of doing good business in Russia, particularly in agricultural implements, electrical and railway equipment.”²⁸¹

Business figures such as the farm equipment manufacturer Vincent Massey travelled on sales trips to the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 30s to promote their products. They aimed to take advantage of the Bolshevik regime’s drive towards rapid modernization, industrialization and restructuring of the Russian system of agriculture in a process that was well underway by the time Stalin had jointly launched collectivization and the Five Year Plans at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s. By 1925, A. Yazikoff had made it clear to Skelton that the 19 million dollars’ worth of orders placed by the USSR in Canada in that year alone were largely for Canadian wheat products, with only a quarter of a million being for agricultural machinery, aluminum or seeds²⁸²

Later in 1925 a wide-ranging report on Soviet-Canadian relations concluded that “Canada is assuming an important place in Soviet trade,” with 36 million roubles exported to the USSR during that fiscal year. This stood in contrast with 53 million for the leading exporter, Britain, 51

²⁸⁰Prime Minister to Acting Prime Minister, Telegram, London, July 21, 1921, cited in *Documents on Canadian External Relations, Volume 3: 1919-1925*. Ottawa, Department of External Affairs, 1971, 803.

²⁸¹O.D. Skelton to King, 29 July 1924, King Papers, MG 24J4, vol. 142, cited in Williams, 187.

²⁸²Williams, 188.

million for Germany and 46 million for the USA. Consequently, the Canadian business community grew fearful that the USSR would no longer need Canadian wheat once its own production went back to normal, after the severe disruption to the system that had been wrought by the Russian Civil War²⁸³.

In May 1927 Ottawa agreed to go along with the British in breaking off relations with the USSR. This was in response to the illicit espionage activities uncovered in that year that had been carried out in London by ARCOS (the All-Russian Co-Operative Society, which had been established to co-ordinate Anglo-Soviet trade.) Ottawa had been informed of this scandal by the British Home Secretary. (Ironically shortly before the Soviet spies were exposed, the British Governor-General in Ottawa had told the Dominions Office in London that “so far as Canada is concerned there has been a steady and considerable growth of trade under the [1921] Agreement and there has not been any substantial ground for complaint as to espionage or propaganda against the present official in Canada²⁸⁴.” However, in spite of the fact that the 1921 trade agreement was terminated, the Canadian government still asked the British for permission to continue “ordinary trade²⁸⁵”

Canada was arguably justified in making this request. In 1926 Britain’s dominions were defined as “autonomous communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate in any respect of their domestic or external affairs though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of nations.” This signified at least some change in the attempts to direct Canadian foreign relations that were apparent at the 1922 Genoa conference, further signifying the increase of Canadian

²⁸³Williams, 188.

²⁸⁴Governor General to DOMS, May 26 1927, cited in Williams, 188.

²⁸⁵Governor General to DOMS, May 30 1927, cited in Williams, 188.

autonomy in its foreign relations²⁸⁶. This would affect Canada's future dealings with the Soviet Union even as its interests frequently overlapped with Britain's, and the two governments continued to remain in intimate contact with each other where such issues as Soviet trade were concerned.

When studying the Canadian-Soviet trade relationship during the Bennett government, another interesting perspective can be obtained by examining the diaries of the then leader of the opposition, former Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King. Surprisingly, several statements made by King in his diary suggested that he looked on the USSR with a sympathetic eye. It was a fitting representation of those individuals who Bennett found himself going up against, who argued fervently in favour of trade with the USSR and scoffed at the notion that there was any moral quandary associated with such dealings. On October 8, 1930, King commented on a book about Russia he was in the process of reading by Maurice Hindus: "It looks to me as though through her peasantry Russia will still work into representative Govt, that she is about where Britain was in the days of the Magna Carta, with 20th century influences and ideas operating around her in a most persistent way²⁸⁷." This statement, which suggests King's apparent belief that the USSR was a nation with a burgeoning affinity for representative democracy, comes as a shock to a reader well acquainted with the cruel absolutism of the Stalinist state.

On October 10 1930 he wrote that the Russian Revolution was destined to produce "...a higher and finer civilization²⁸⁸." His entry from November 30, however, mentions a conversation

²⁸⁶Williams, 194.

²⁸⁷William Lyon Mackenzie King, "Wednesday, October 8, 1930". Diary, Item: 12532, Library and Archives Canada.

²⁸⁸William Lyon Mackenzie King, "Friday, October 10, 1930". Diary, Item: 12525, Library and Archives Canada.

with journalists named Ecclestone of the “Star” and Mears of “The Gazette”, in which “Both speak of Russian competition in wheat etc. as something much feared by all in Europe²⁸⁹.” On January 13, 1931, he mentions the Imperial Economic Conference, and the conversation in which Vincent Massey declared that “the conference was a failure every way, that Bennett had lowered Canada’s prestige etc²⁹⁰.” On April 1 he recounted a meeting of the Liberal caucus in which many members spoke in favour of Bennett’s partial embargo on Soviet goods; “I spoke out very frankly, said I did not see how communistic ideas could come in on coal and furs etc,.....that Russia would probably undersell Canada in markets of world in wheat to get square, it was declaration of economic war, that some party would have to be found in Canada that could yet save the day with Russia, that I had had faith in the power of Xtianity to hold its own, that it should fight for its principles²⁹¹”

On August 16 1932 he paraphrased a speech by Bennett at a reception for the delegates of the Imperial Economic Conference, referring to Bennett’s trying to pressure the British to stop their trading in beef with Russia and Australia and limit their trade with Argentina so that Canadian beef might receive preferential access to British markets. Here King remarks that the Mayor of Ottawa’s praise of Bennett was “disgusting. It was plain from the looks on the faces of the delegates present that things are going anything but pleasantly, that relations [with Britain] are in fact very strained....”²⁹²

As much as King’s views were coloured by partisan bias, they are representative of two mindsets among those who opposed punitive economic action against the USSR. One of these

²⁸⁹William Lyon Mackenzie King, “Sunday, November 30, 1930.” Diary, Item: 12606, Library and Archives Canada.

²⁹⁰William Lyon Mackenzie King, “Tuesday, January 13, 1931.” Diary, Item: 12677, Library and Archives Canada.

²⁹¹William Lyon Mackenzie King, “Wednesday, April 1, 1931.” Diary, Item: 12807, Library and Archives Canada.

²⁹²William Lyon Mackenzie King, “Tuesday, August 16, 1932”. Diary, Item: 13699, Library and Archives Canada.

would be the camp that took the Soviet regime's propaganda at face value that the Soviet people lived free and prosperous lives, and sympathized with the goals of societal improvement that this propaganda often professed. Such individuals failed to regard the Stalinist regime as constituting any threat to human rights and thus saw no necessity in attempting to confront it for its actions. The other mindset was of those who believed that trying to break off or otherwise undermine trade with the Soviet Union would have deleterious effects on commerce.

King's diary entries reveal his mindset to be a combination of all these viewpoints. Including a belief that Canada's antagonistic attitude towards the USSR would diminish its international prestige and strain its relationship with Britain, which he saw as attempting mutually beneficial co-existence with the Soviets. But there were several vocal individuals among R.B. Bennett's political opposition in Ottawa who favoured trade with the USSR for strictly pragmatic reasons. Others who opposed trading with the USSR on principle (as we shall see in the parliamentary debates) remarked with frustration how difficult it was proving to sever economic ties with the Soviets as Bennett had been attempting to do.

At the same time, the issue of Canadian-Soviet trade continued to be hotly debated in Parliament. The nature of the debates foreshadowed that in a time of economic turbulence for Canada and the world, economic concerns would wield paramount importance in the discussion about the merits and drawbacks of Canada-Soviet commerce. In parliamentary debate on October 11, 1932, Co-operate Commonwealth Federation Leader James Shaver Woodsworth remarked on the sale of Canadian flour to the USSR, "paid for either in gold or in goods..." He expressed his surprise by saying "...I cannot understand why the Canadian government would permit the incoming of any tarnished Russian gold after having said it was such a fearful thing to

permit Russian goods to enter this country²⁹³.” Woodsworth, who would later explain in great detail his advocacy for continued trade with the USSR, was quick to point out how for all Bennett’s public rhetoric about the immorality of the Soviet regime (and by extension of doing business with it), trade between the Soviets and Canada had yet to cease outright. It could easily have been taken as a veiled accusation of hypocrisy on Bennett’s part, and an insinuation that trading with the Soviets was perhaps not the great moral evil that Bennett had been quick to declare it as when he had decried communism in the past. .

Other advocates of Canada-Soviet commerce bluntly sought to avoid debate about the moral dilemmas of trading with Stalin by opting to bring up the material losses to the nation that been incurred by Bennett’s initial reluctance to pursue an unhesitating trade relationship (even as the government’s commitment to excluding the Soviets economically began to waver.) The next day on October 12, Liberal Party member Joseph-Alexandre Mercier drew attention to how the embargo placed on Soviet furs in 1931 had been lifted almost as quickly as it had been imposed; “This was a great revelation to the Canadian people who were under the impression that Russian products would be barred from this country. A few citizens were anxious to export farm implements to Russia. We could have received from Russia an order for \$5000000 dollars. The Massey-Harris Company, manufacturers of farm implements, would have opened their doors wide and given work to numerous people by turning out \$5000000 worth of farm implements. This company was requested not to accept this order. Mr. Mackie, trade agent of the Soviet

²⁹³Canada. Parliament. House of Commons. Debates, 4th Session Seventeenth Parliament, 23-24 George V, Volume 1, 1932-33, October 11, 1932. Ottawa: J.O. Patenaude Acting King’s Printer, 1933.

republic, saw his plans upset. The embargo was lifted on furs, but the exportation of farm implements was prohibited²⁹⁴.”

Still others in favour of trading with the USSR did not avoid the moral dilemma of doing business with Stalin, but opted to emphasize material gains and losses over moral concerns (especially in the nation’s fragile economic state.) In an address to the House of Commons, Quebec Liberal MP Eduard Charles St Pere put it best when he said “We were asked, we Liberals, especially those of Quebec: Are you in favour or not of trade with Russia? As a matter of principle, no! But we were well aware that international trade often, if not always, pays little attention to questions of principle.” He quoted an article from the *New York Times* that claimed that international oil companies were doing business with the USSR with impunity because “such transactions have no political influence and foresee that they will have no specific effect on the price of oil as a whole. These foreign companies, states the article, are making a desperate effort to impress Moscow that the Soviet government cannot possibly remain alone in competing against all foreign countries²⁹⁵.”

On October 20, 1932, the terms of the Imperial Conference Trade Agreements were presented to the House of Commons. In a speech J.S. Woodsworth asked “Will the farmer, the manufacturer and the lumberman complain if the Ottawa Agreement has caused Canada to abrogate her trade pact with the Soviets?” He continued to expound upon the theme that for Canada to shrink from trade with the USSR would be to the severe disadvantage of the nation, to

²⁹⁴Canada. Parliament. House of Commons. Debates, 4th Session Seventeenth Parliament, 23-24 George V, Volume 1, 1932-33, October 11, 1932. Ottawa: J.O. Patenaude Acting King’s Printer, 1933.

²⁹⁵Canada. Parliament. House of Commons. Debates, 4th Session Seventeenth Parliament, 23-24 George V, Volume 1, 1932-33, October 11, 1932. Ottawa: J.O. Patenaude Acting King’s Printer, 1933.

supplement his earlier claims that there was little that was morally objectionable in maintaining such a relationship;

“All the European powers have recognized the Russian form of government, our principal competitor. England necessarily cannot set aside this large market with its 145,000,000 people. Notwithstanding the pacts which we are discussing, she will certainly find a means of trading with that country....The same applies to other European nations. Canada has placed an embargo on Soviet products and has not recognized the Soviet government. Had this embargo not existed, Canada could obtain, at retail prices, during this crisis, gasoline at twelve cents per gallon, instead of paying 25 to 30 cents. It could purchase first quality anthracite coal at \$6 per ton, retail price, instead of paying \$16 to \$17 dollars. These advantages which we deny ourselves because of the governments’ attitude, others will reap the benefit; the European nations will purchase these products which we need; they will be resold to us at a good profit. We cannot help being cheated when the occasion arises. Canada will use as she is now doing, Russian coal under a pseudonym paying \$16 instead of \$6; it will purchase Russian gasoline under a sham name at 30 cents per gallon, and who will be able to detect these products and prevent this trade? Absolutely no one²⁹⁶.”

Debating the Imperial Conference trade agreements, Woodsworth asserted in regards to the ongoing embargo debate that;

I think we should consider carefully the results of this action....we might very easily antagonize a great country that might be one of our best customers. I have again and again urged that we should trade with Russia. That was the policy of the late government in Great Britain. As I read the papers is it only a question of time until a new agreement will be drawn between Great Britain and Russia, so that trade with Russia is not a matter that can simply be regarded as a vague dream or fad of a few people in this country. We missed a great opportunity a year or two ago when we might have taken Russian coal in exchange for some of our agricultural implements. Now it would appear that we may sacrifice any chance of dealing with this great country which has been the first to go into state enterprise on a large scale²⁹⁷.”

Later in his speech, Woodsworth further defended trading with the USSR by referring to factually suspect information cited by the prominent English Soviet sympathizer Sidney Webb;

...it does not seem to me to be possible to say that the goods there produced are produced under unfair conditions. It has been claimed that Russia is dumping these goods at below cost and for that reason is not able to build up her reserves—forced sales, as it were. My last quotation from Sydney Webb is as follows: ‘Soviet Russia is year by year diverting from

²⁹⁶Canada. Parliament. House of Commons. Debates, 4th Session Seventeenth Parliament, 23-24 George V, Volume 1, 1932-33, October 11, 1932. Ottawa: J.O. Patenaude Acting King’s Printer, 1933.

²⁹⁷Canada. Parliament. House of Commons. Debates, 4th Session Seventeenth Parliament, 23-24 George V, Volume 1, 1932-33, October 11, 1932. Ottawa: J.O. Patenaude Acting King’s Printer, 1933.

consumption by the present generation of consumers, at least a quarter of what its workers are producing, in order that the consumers in future years may reap the benefits in an assured higher standard of life.’ That is a much larger proportion given to capital expenditures than prevails in any other country. Russia is putting aside those reserves, she is adding that much to capital, and any country adding to capital at that rate cannot be said to be producing goods under unfair conditions. . . . I do not defend everything that is being done in Russia, but I do say that an experiment is being worked out there that is worthy of our consideration. We might very well place ourselves in such relationship to Russia that she might send us some of her surplus goods which we need, and that we might in return export some of our capital goods which she needs at the present time. I think such a transaction would be beneficial to both of us. As it is to-day, we are deliberately setting out to make trade war upon any country that proposes to carry out state enterprises than we ourselves, at the present moment, are prepared to undertake.”

Woodsworth here clearly finds it useful to refer to the words of an enthusiastic support of the Soviet experiment like Sydney Webb in order to argue that there was nothing inherently problematic about trading with the USSR. At most his reluctance to “defend everything that is being done in Russia” while still asserting that the Soviet experiment was “worthy of our consideration” seems to imply a belief that Stalin’s excesses were nothing but a temporary side effect of his program of economic restructuring. Not all who advocated trade with the Soviets were necessarily as deeply infatuated with Stalin and the Soviet system as Sydney Webb and George Bernard Shaw. But they were nonetheless quite clear in their belief that there was enough to be gained from a commercial relationship with the USSR that the undertaking was worthwhile from a strictly utilitarian perspective.

In his economic dealings with the Soviet Union, R.B. Bennett would soon encounter difficulties in reconciling his ostensibly staunch anticommunism with the economic realities that faced Canada as a participant in international trade. This was made all the more difficult by the degree to which anticommunism was part of Bennett’s platform and style of governance. With this information in mind, it makes it all the more baffling that his government maintained such an apparent state of inactivity even as the aforementioned information regarding the starvation of

the Ukrainian people began to circulate widely. In his private papers were an overabundance of letters from religious organizations and ordinary citizens alternatively praising him for or urging him to increase his hard line on “Godless” Russia. Early on in his term he had been inclined to dismiss those who implored him to maintain more trade and contact with the USSR as being cranks or communists²⁹⁸. It would seem that his political success rested on taking a sufficiently hardline anti-communist stance to please his constituents. In time, however, it would become apparent that other constituents did not feel the same way.

Bennett also believed that an economic embargo on the Soviet Union could also be undertaken with the support of the American President Herbert Hoover. Skelton had been informed by the Canadian representative in Washington H.H. Wrong that President Hoover believed that an embargo on Soviet exports would accelerate economic recovery in countries currently suffering from the effects of the Great Depression;”....recovery would be facilitated if several of the more important trading powers took steps to limit their imports from Russia.” Hoover especially believed that Canada could rely enough upon its own major timber export of pulpwood that it could safely place an embargo on Soviet timber exports, which would have devastating effects on the Soviet Union because it was in a “desperate state” to export all that it could. Bennett maintained the belief that he could potentially form a coalition between the United States, Canada and Great Britain that could impose an international blockade of sufficient power upon the Soviet Union and thereby bring about its collapse²⁹⁹. But this idea began increasingly to look economically impractical from Canada’s end.

²⁹⁸Williams, 1974.

²⁹⁹Wrong to Skelton, November 11 1930, RG/732/103, cited in Williams, 194.

Here we have seen how the Canadian and British governments began to contemplate taking action to punish the USSR economically by restricting their trade with it, as their leaders obtained more and more information confirming the barbarity and cruelty of the Stalinist regime as a whole. However, their attempts to realize this plan were occurring at the same time that both these governments and private entrepreneurs within their countries were becoming more and more deeply involved in trading various goods with the Soviet Union. Ongoing trade with the USSR was increasingly encouraged by those who either admired the Soviet state or believed that much was to be gained by trading with the Soviets (or lost by ceasing trade with them.) Would these realities serve to strain any plans that British and Canadian leaders had to take punitive economic action against Stalin?

Chapter 6. The Failure of the Embargoes

Why exactly were the attempts the Canadian government made to penalize the Soviet Union economically unsuccessful? It would soon become apparent that economic realities and the demands of influential private interests were seriously undermining the Bennett government's attempts to decrease its trade with the USSR. These realities conflicted with the hardline anti-communist and anti-Soviet stance that had characterized the earlier years of Bennett's government, and the situation was such that his anti-communism by itself was not sufficient to cut off Canada-USSR trade completely.

Even as it was faced with competition from cheaply priced incoming Soviet grain, Canadian wheat was suffering from a lack of international markets, contributing significantly to unemployment that was recognized as a key problem after the August election of 1930. Therefore Bennett was certainly justified in presenting the embargo on some (but still not all) Soviet imports as a measure enjoying widespread public support³⁰⁰. Of course, at the time Bennett first imposed his embargo, many were sceptical that an embargo on Soviet wheat would be of any real consequence as there was doubt that the Soviets could produce enough wheat to risk flooding Canadian markets to begin with. A British exporter wrote in a confidential memorandum in 1930 that "There is...no doubt that any reasonable forecast of the competition which must be expected from Russia [for wheat exports] would be of immense value to all British wheat producers and we are desperately in the dark still³⁰¹."

³⁰⁰Williams, 194.

³⁰¹S.L. Holmes' comments on Andrew Cairns' report on 'Rusian Wheat', February 7 1931, D035/196/6, cited in Williams, 195.

Evidently at the time the large scale international wheat exports that corresponded with Soviet collectivization and the Five Year Plans had not yet reached their height. But the amount of Soviet wheat the British were already receiving was a substantial one, and by mid-1931 Russia was now the premier supplier of British wheat imports. These imports had gone up from nothing in 1929 to over five million bushels in the first three months of 1931. Even as the Canadian government continued to debate the merit and wisdom of banning the import of Soviet wheat into Canada, the sheer quantity of it that was being exported to Britain was still denying Canada markets for its own grain, with each Soviet bushel a potential supplanter of one from Canada³⁰².

When Andrew Cairns, in his capacity as a representative of the Canadian wheat pool, made his first trip to the Soviet Union in 1931, his reports of the mass starvation resulting from collectivization of agriculture initially gave British officials some hope that Soviet agriculture was in enough decline that it would soon cease to pose a threat to the agricultural industry of Britain and its colonies. Observing the liquidation of the small peasant kulak farmers as part of Stalin's brutal policy of "dekulakization," the disastrous effects wrought by the mismanagement of the self-anointed agricultural expert Trofim Lysenko, and the mass destruction of cereal crops in the Ukraine, Cairns' reports initially projected an image of a Soviet agricultural system in complete chaos³⁰³. It seemed unlikely that the Soviet Union could possibly be a short, medium or even long-term threat to Canadian exporters of grain, except at the margin.

Cairns, deducing the first conclusion that the reader of his report would no doubt draw, acknowledged that there "are many reasons for being optimistic about the probable effects of

³⁰²Williams, 195.

³⁰³Williams, 195.

Russian competition on the position of primary producers in the Dominions.” However, Cairns also stressed that even with the apparent disorganization of their system, the Soviets still stood to massively increase the crop yields they produced, even if it was only through the excessively brutal methods by which they forced the peasants to give up their grain³⁰⁴. While Cairns’ reports found their way to Ottawa as well as to London, their exact impact is difficult to assess for London and even more so for Ottawa.

The existing documents testify to the fact that British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald was shown letters from the Foreign Office pertaining to the Soviet famine in 1932. An attached notice advised him to read the letters “in an hour of relaxation...It is an interesting if squalid story of black bread, hunger, tears and death³⁰⁵.” In any case, the Soviet exports of grain continued, making it impossible to decrease Canadian stocks, which continued to overhang the market until well into the late 1930s. It also ensured that the Bennett government, for all the hostility it held towards the Soviet Union, was unable to take any serious measures to wage the extensive economic warfare via blockade and embargo of which the Prime Minister had dreamed. The market situation would certainly have hindered the Canadian government’s ability to do anything constructive in response to the famine in the Ukraine, assuming that Bennett even paid sufficient attention to the reports concerning it.

At first it appeared as if the plans of those within the British Commonwealth who advocated for the economic isolation of the USSR would easily come to fruition. On July 27th, 1932, around the time of Bennett’s confident assertions at the Imperial Economic Conference that Canada could easily arrange a complete blockade on Soviet imports, the Toronto *Globe*

³⁰⁴Williams, 195.

³⁰⁵H.H. Henderson to James Ramsay MacDonald, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/303, late 1932, cited in Williams, 196.

reported that the British government, in offering trade concessions to Canada, were responding to Ottawa's requests that the British assist in placing a blockade on the import of Soviet goods into Canada.

However, the same article went into great detail about the obstacles obstructing this goal. The blockade was intended to be part of an Empire-wide plan for the standardization of the percentage of goods produced within the Empire itself, where goods produced by British colonies received preferential tariffs over extra-Imperial produced goods, as had been discussed at the Imperial Conference. Unfortunately, the British delegates asserted that while it was entirely in their power to comply with Ottawa's requests that the tariffs on inter-Empire goods be lowered, the British delegate, a Mr. [Stanley?] Baldwin, was unable to be persuaded that increasing the tariffs on foreign imports from such countries as the Soviet Union would have any positive economic effects. Consequently he strongly urged Canada to reconsider attempting such a policy, even though the Canadians would still theoretically be entirely capable of implementing it themselves³⁰⁶.

These difficulties in negotiations apparently did not stop Bennett from later asserting triumphantly that the British would be standing behind another major decision of his. On November 9th, 1932, the *Globe* reported that Bennett intended to exclude the importing of Soviet oil to Canada by a federal order, and that contrary to their earlier apprehensions the British would no doubt support the embargo as part of the greater scheme of inter-Imperial economic cooperation to the exclusion of foreign economic interests. Similar to the grain dispute, it was maintained that the low price of Soviet oil made competition with the oil from British territories

³⁰⁶William Marchington, "Britain Offers Trade Concessions To Canada". *The Globe and Mail*, 27 July 1932.

such as Trinidad unfair. (Canada, of course, had insufficient oil at its disposal so that importing it from somewhere or other was paramount in a time of economic instability.) The tariff bill was initially opposed by William Lyon Mackenzie King as leader of the opposition for having been rushed into law without it having been consulted and approved in full detail by Parliament³⁰⁷, but Bennett was confident that it would have its desired effect. It would be some time before the challenges obstructing his plans would become apparent.

In 1932 Bennett was taking several other measures in an effort to try and stave off the encroachment of Soviet economic influence in Canada, some of which corresponded with more general efforts to promote the industry of Canada and other British colonies. Bennett's private documents from 1932 attest to his working with the British in trying to pass an anti-dumping resolution to prevent Canadian products from having to compete with an influx of cheaply priced commodities exported by any foreign state³⁰⁸. Bennett received a copy of the anti-dumping plan on August 17th, 1932, to review for eventual submission to the Delegation of the United Kingdom. Bennett's Minister of National Revenue assured him that the plan would leave plenty of room to take deliberate action against those nations perceived as offenders due to their dumping large quantities of their exports in Canada. A letter from a subordinate dated August 10th, 1932, had suggested to Bennett that the anti-dumping resolution emphasize that dumping duty not be allied to British goods imported to Canada³⁰⁹.

Meanwhile, the failure of the British government at least to offer up any substantial international protest in response to the reports of the Ukrainian famine it received can be partially explained by examining an international incident that occurred in 1933. (This lack of

³⁰⁷"Oil From Russia May Be Excluded By Federal Order". *The Globe*, 9 November 1932.

³⁰⁸R.B. Bennett Papers M1176 UNB 98.

³⁰⁹Canada. Ontario. "Anti-Dumping Resolution" R.B. Bennett Papers M1176 UNB 98.[Ottawa. Ontario.]

response was, of course, to affect the Canadian government's response as well.) In January 1933, several employees of the British electrical engineering company Metropolitan-Vickers based in the Soviet Union were arrested on charges of espionage and sabotage on behalf of the British government. Those arrested included Allan Monkhouse (the manager of the company's Soviet branch) and employees W.H. Macdonald, W.H. Thornton, and John Cushny. The arrests prompted the protests of the British Ambassador to Moscow, Sir Esmond Ovey³¹⁰. It was not until March 19 that the Metropolitan-Vickers Electric Co. Ltd was able to release an official statement of the charges that had been levelled at their employees. They were accused of sabotage of the hydroelectric turbines of the Dnieprostroy Dam, though the precise technical details of the sabotage they were accused of committing put the entire story into doubt. The company statement commented;

“The idea of damaging these huge turbines by pouring in sand or acid is manifestly absurd. Each blade used in these machines weighs about five tons and millions of gallons of water pass through the turbines daily which would prevent any acid or sand remaining in them. The statement that the charge against the arrested men is of such a nature, therefore, is fantastic³¹¹.”

The dubious nature of the accusations, especially pinning the company with the crime of inexplicably sabotaging its own work, marked the entire affair as being similar to the frequent paranoid and patently false accusations that were used by the Soviet secret police agencies to terrorize their subjects. Of course, Stalin asserted to *New York Herald Tribune* writer Ralph Barnes that the accusations against the Englishmen had nothing to do with xenophobia and that the crimes of which they were accused were entirely real; “As for the few Englishman, the employees of the Metropolitan-Vickers Co., they are being prosecuted, not as Englishmen, but as

³¹⁰Martin Gillbert. *The Illustrated London News: Marching To War 1933-1939*. London: Military Heritage Press, 1989, 29.

³¹¹*The Illustrated London News*, April 22 1933, cited in Gillbert, 29.

persons who, according to the affirmation of the investigating authorities, have violated the law of the USSR." By the end of the trial on April 19, the six British and 11 Russian employees of Metropolitan-Vickers had been accused of counter-revolutionary activities, bribery and espionage in addition to sabotage³¹²

Thornton received three years imprisonment, Macdonald two years, Monkhouse, Nordwall and Cushny expulsion, and A.W. Gregory was acquitted. Foreign journalists at the trial noticed that written evidence to substantiate the charges was starkly lacking. Macdonald and Thornton had initially been forced to sign confessions to the charges after interrogation by the Soviet secret police, the GPU. Describing his having seen Macdonald during the trial, the American journalist Eugene Lyons noted; "Watching his twitching fingers and glazed eyes, we all felt that he was putty under the manipulating fingers of the Secret Police³¹³."

The draconian interrogation tactics of the GPU certainly put into doubt the veracity of Thornton's initially naming 27 British spies before he retracted the confession during the trial, as well as the confessions of extensive involvement in the alleged sabotage by the convicted Russian engineers³¹⁴. While the trial to which the Englishmen were subjected eventually resulted in all but one of them being released on bail, the British government, after initially attempting diplomatic negotiations to have their imprisoned citizens released, eventually responded by imposing an economic embargo on the Soviet Union despite having been in the middle of

³¹²*The Case of N.P. Vitvitsky, [et al.], Charged with Wrecking Activities at Power Stations in the Soviet Union: Heard Before the Special Session of the Supreme Court of the USSR in Moscow, April 12–19, 1933: Translation of the Official Verbatim Report.* In Three Volumes. Moscow: State Law Publishing House, 1933; volume 1, pp. 11-12.

³¹³Eugene Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1937) 370.

³¹⁴Lyons, 371.

renegotiating their previous economic agreement. The suspension of the treaty negotiations was announced by the British parliament on March 20³¹⁵.

But the coming months would soon yield revelations of just how much difficulty Great Britain and Canada were faced with in actually maintaining any sort of economic embargo on the Soviet Union that might in any way have offset the disastrous effects of its aggressive agricultural export policies on the people of such places as the Ukraine. Following the release of the Metropolitan-Vickers employees, the British renegotiated their agreement with the Soviets and restored trade, demonstrating the high priority in which they held their economic concerns³¹⁶. The events of the trial had also demonstrated the compulsion of foreign governments to be cooperative with the Soviets out of fears that their citizens might become the object of vindictive Soviet state paranoia (as easily as the Soviet people themselves.)

Foreign states that wished to do business with the Soviet Union (and keep their citizens safe in the process) would have to concede to the Soviet way of doing things, which Britain and the Commonwealth countries that followed its international economic policies such as Canada were forced to acknowledge. The Metropolitan-Vickers crisis was the perfect representation of the struggles inherent in Britain and other Western nations doing business with the Soviet regime in a commercial relationship which both parties saw fit to maintain, but which was made increasingly perilous by the suspicion and hostility towards the British which Soviet communist ideology inculcated into so much of Soviet officialdom.

But for all the dangers of dealing with a state whose propaganda painted them as treacherous imperialists and duplicitous dens of hostile spies, Western nations such as Britain

³¹⁵Lyons, 371.

³¹⁶Lyons, 372.

and the Commonwealth countries came to realize that severing themselves economically from Soviet markets was not so easy a proposition. Merely a few weeks after the Imperial Economic Conference in Ottawa in 1932, R.B. Bennett was forced to admit that Canada was unable to lessen its dependency on Soviet oil and was continuing to import it. British newspapers such as the *Daily Telegraph* responded with derision to this news. Bennett was further embarrassed when the Canadian High Commissioner to London informed him that the December 27th 1932 issue of the *New York Times* joined them in reporting that Canadian firms had agreed to a facility enabling the exchange of oil for railway material to the Soviets. Bennett offered up unconvincing protests that the reports of these agreements were “obviously without foundation.”³¹⁷

To make matters worse, 1932 also witnessed the “Serkau affair” in December. Businessman J.G. Serkau had proposed to the government the creation of a Canadian cattle-for-Russian-oil and anthracite deal, despite an embargo having been placed on the latter product in 1930. Serkau also wanted Canadian government financial guarantees for this venture. R.B. Bennett had apparently agreed to the plan and consequently was forced to defend his decision to Parliament³¹⁸. He was also compelled to defend it in countless letters to MPs from distressed areas and to individuals of the sort who had earlier praised him with such ardour for his crusading anti-communist policies. In correspondence with Ramsay MacDonald, Bennett admitted; “The whole matter is one of propaganda to create a condition of despair such as you suggest and it apparently is having the desired effect³¹⁹.” With political embarrassments such as these it was apparent that effectively maintaining an economic blockade of the Soviet Union was a more difficult task than the Western democracies could muster, thus making it all the more

³¹⁷Canadian High Commissioner (London) to Bennett, October 26 and October 31 1932, Bennett Papers, M 1031 (PAC) cited in Williams, 205.

³¹⁸Williams, 207.

³¹⁹Bennett to MacDonald, 13 January 1933, Bennett Papers, M 1032, cited in Williams, 208.

unlikely that any foreign government could take decisive action to halt the deliberate starvation of the Ukrainian people. And in fact, events were to occur that for many would add an increased respectability to maintaining economic relations with the USSR.

In 1933, the United States, under the administration of Democratic president Franklin Delano Roosevelt, renewed diplomatic contact with Russia for the first time since the revolution of 1917. This action had followed the decision by the president in March 1933 to permit the import of Soviet asbestos into the United States. At the time, Canada was the greatest producer of asbestos in the world, exporting 56.7 percent of global production in contrast to the Soviet Union's 27.6 percent. The United States consumed 55.6 percent of the total world production, so consequently, an influx of Soviet asbestos in the United States could only do damage to a colossal Canadian export market. Furthermore, in May 1932 the Canadian representative in Washington H.H. Wrong had reported that the Americans would soon be contemplating diplomatic recognition of the Soviet regime "chiefly as the result of the search by the United States for foreign markets³²⁰."

Wrong later also noted that Roosevelt had accorded 50 to 75 million dollars' worth of credits to the Soviet trade office in New York, AMTORG. By October 17 1933, when Roosevelt's offer of talks was accepted by Mikhail Kalinin, the popular consensus was already that R.B. Bennett's strategy of attempting to engineer the economic isolation of the Soviet Union by calling upon American help was an abject failure. Bennett's opponents in the Liberal newspaper *The Toronto Daily Star* seized the opportunity to print such headlines as "U.S. Move Forces Hand of Bigoted Canadians³²¹." Not only had any serious efforts to curtail the

³²⁰Wrong to Bennett, May 7 and M.M. Mahoney (both Washington) to Bennett, 16 September 1933, M 1032, cited in Williams, 206.

³²¹"U.S. Move Forces Hand of Bigoted Canadians," *The Toronto Daily Star*, November 18 1933.

international economic activity of the Soviet Union fallen apart completely, but with the recognition of the regime by the United States, Stalin's political-economic policies that had wrought such catastrophe for the people of such Soviet subject states as the Ukraine were now effectively being rewarded by the international community.

It is clear that the British imported Soviet wheat in such quantities that they deemed the idea of excluding it from their shores to be unfeasible. It has been established that Bennett's attempts to create an embargo on imports from the Soviet Union never came to include agricultural produce, and that he himself admitted as much that Canada's reliance upon Soviet oil similar rendered implausible his initial plans to break off all trade with the Soviets. The oil trade with the USSR in particular was one which Canada's politicians were afraid to jeopardize by excessively antagonizing Stalin's regime. Throughout the 1930s various oil-drilling companies in Canada were concerned about the increasing difficulty in locating larger sources of oil within Canada, for while their drilling throughout the decade located various small sources the lack of discoveries that were on par with the large reserves uncovered in Western Canada in the 1920s caused concerns to arise that new sources of oil would be in short supply. As late as 1946, only 10 percent of Canadian consumption came from domestic sources.³²²

Furthermore, in a period in which the overt official anti-communism of Bennett increased the tension of the Soviet-Canadian trade relationship, the Soviets themselves were not oblivious to the fact that Canada was unable or unwilling to completely sever its economic ties with them. The Canada-USSR trade relationship in this period is outlined in excellent detail in the book "Canada In The Soviet Mirror: Ideology and Perception in Soviet Foreign Affairs, 1917-1991.

³²²Robert D. Bott, "Petroleum Industries" (*Historica Canada*, 2015 <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/petroleum-industries>).

Together with Andrew J. Williams' "Trading With The Bolsheviks," it is one of the most comprehensive historiographies of the obscure and neglected subject of early Canadian-Soviet commerce. The author attempts to rely as much as possible on the evidence of deals between the Soviet regime and Canadian private enterprise rather than giving most of the space over to personal interpretation, trying to provide a straightforward recollection of the history of Canadian-Soviet commerce. The facts of the deals that were struck and the agreements made themselves sufficiently illustrate that there was much profit to be made from trading with the Soviets, that select wealthy individuals were determined to pursue this profit, and substantial funds stood to either be made or lost depending on the continuation of the trade relationship. There were examples of the uneasy necessity with which both sides viewed their trade partnership in the commentaries of the Hungarian-born Soviet economist Eugene Varga. In the January 1933 issue of the Soviet magazine *Inprecor*, Varga wrote of Canadian attempts to maintain the export of cattle to the USSR in exchange for oil despite the embargos of certain Canadian goods that Stalin had enacted in response to Bennett's. Varga also made note of attempts by the Aluminum Company of Canada to supply the USSR with 1.5 million dollars worth of its product, half of which was to be paid for in oil and gold³²³.

The fact that all of this was occurring simultaneously to Bennett's proclamations about the necessity of excluding Soviet exports from Canadian markets, and his aforementioned domestic crackdowns on the activities of Canadian communists, merely demonstrated in Varga's opinion that it was all an elaborate façade to conceal the "deepening of the crisis and desperation of the capitalists." Canadian producers tried to negotiate with Amtorg, the organization which encompassed the combined representation of Soviet trade in both the United States and Great

³²³J.L. Black, *Canada in the Soviet Mirror*. Carleton University Press, 1998, 101.

Britain, to construct the cattle for oil barter scheme. The Canadian agent G.G. Serkau, the Canadian Ministry of Agriculture, Amtorg and several Canadian cattle associations spent October 1932 to August 1933 in the process of negotiation³²⁴.

Furthermore, farmers' movement representatives Agnes Macphail and William Irvine supported the arrangement emphatically in the House of Commons, but it fell through when the Soviets tried to add the embargoed item of anthracite coal added to the arrangement. The entire affair demonstrated aptly that in spite of the tough anti-communist stance that Bennett was determined to project to an electorate who frequently took his claims that he was waging a "crusade" against the "godless" Bolsheviks to heart, the government and those wealthy individuals who supported it were still eager to trade with the Soviets apparently in spite of their fears of the perils of competing with them. After all, before the agreement had failed (despite coming so close to being fulfilled), G.G. Serkau had asserted that the members of his "syndicate" of business interests included "enough influential Canadians to guarantee the passage of his contract even through Parliament, and not only through the Cabinet of Ministers³²⁵."

Even Canadian farmers who harboured apprehension about competing with Soviet produce were suddenly eager to strike a deal with them out of desperation for income. Serkau also told the Soviets that his connections would make it easy for him to eventually lift the embargo on such products as anthracite coal. The Amtorg report made optimistic projections about the benefits such hypothetical agreements would have for them. The statement could just as easily be applied to any Soviet imports other than the ones Serkau was trying to negotiate over;

"The political and social significance of such an agreement is very great. By this contract we could win the Canadian market for Soviet anthracite and Soviet oil and

³²⁴Black, 101

³²⁵Amtorg Report to Commissariat of Foreign Trade, March 14 1932, cited in Black, 101.

pave the way for a series of other Soviet products. We could also win sympathy for the USSR among a wide mass of the farming population and open the possibility of renewing normal diplomatic relations with Canada, which within a year is likely to have a friendly administration³²⁶.”

We also know that the events in question had no apparent effect on Canada’s relationship with the Ukrainian state itself, which did not truly commence until decades later in the early 1990s following Ukrainian autonomy and the breakup of the Soviet Union. And yet, the precise answer as to why an embargo on Soviet grain never came to pass even when Bennett was attempting to exclude other Soviet exports from Canada remains at first unclear...at least from an analysis of his personal papers that still remain. Even with a lack of evidence of Bennett’s personal thoughts on the matter, we can tell from the information available that his decision to not attempt an embargo on Soviet grain or wheat was based on a desire to placate the private business interests whose political support he sought. The fact that Canadian desire for Soviet oil had already undermined enough Bennett’s stated plans to keep Soviet products out of Canada demonstrates suitably how any similar attempt to exclude Soviet produce might have proved a difficult proposition.

One would have thought that given the daunting task of competing with low-priced Soviet wheat, outraged Canadian farmers would surely have petitioned Bennett to come down hard on Soviet produce coming to the country. However, the transcript of the meeting of a 1933 agricultural convention by Alberta farmers where the subject of creating a National Wheat Board to exclude cheap foreign agricultural imports shows that the discussion was apparently paralysed by inability to settle on when precisely this board should be created³²⁷. Certainly the difficulties surrounding the task of obtaining access to Bennett’s personal papers can offer some explanation

³²⁶ Amtorg Report to Commissariat of Foreign Trade, March 14 1932, cited in Black, 102.

³²⁷ *25th Annual Convention of the United Farmers of Alberta*, 1933, 33.

for the gaps in the information regarding his policies even as other papers from his personal archives shed some light on his thought processes.

In 1947-48, when a significant portion of Bennett's personal papers found their way to Fredericton, Bennett's secretary Alice Millar (who had worked for him since 1914) caused an uproar by seizing several of the papers and burning them in the University of New Brunswick incinerator, apparently because she deemed them "unhistorical"³²⁸. His biographer John Boyko, author of "Bennett: The Rebel Who Challenged And Changed A Nation," notes that Bennett himself was apparently in the habit of destroying his personal papers (presumably those also deemed to be "unhistorical") every seven years³²⁹. Thus, with this apparent lack of any clear, written statements explaining those actions which history records as having been taken by Bennett, one is forced to look to the political and economic climate of the times in order to offer up an explanation.

The desperate state of the Canadian economy during the Great Depression and the privation in which so many Canadians lived is a thoroughly documented reality. By 1933, the unemployment rate in Canada had climbed to 30%. As early as 1931, the prairie farmers were beginning to experience the first of the severely dry, dusty weather conditions worsened by soil erosion and drought that within a few years would spiral out of control into the infamous Dust Bowl that would so thoroughly devastate the region's agriculture. While there were no official accounts reporting on mass starvation, medical authorities reported frequently that among the impoverished classes throughout the nation there were widespread cases of scurvy and other diseases with roots in malnutrition and dietary deficiency. As a third of Canada's Gross National

³²⁸P.B. Waite, *In Search of R.B. Bennett*. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012, 2.

³²⁹John Boyko, *Bennett: The Rebel Who Challenged and Changed A Nation*. Fredericton, NB: Goose Lane Editions, 2012, 3.

Income came from its exports, the blow to world trade following the Wall Street Crash of 1929 had particularly devastating consequences for Canadians. The international wheat market in particular reeled from a severe drop in the value of wheat and subsequently in the price of wheat. Thus the primary product predominantly agricultural Western prairie provinces were hit particularly hard³³⁰.

With the lack of information providing direct insight into Bennett's thought processes, we are forced to extrapolate the motivation for his actions from the national circumstances at the time. We have established that while he was highly resentful of the notion of Canadian farmers having to compete with cheap Soviet agricultural produce being "dumped" in Canada, the farmers of Canada themselves were apparently unable to agree on the manner in which they could most effectively voice their concerns to the government, perhaps diminishing the public outcry that could have forced Bennett's hand in an anxious attempt to placate the electorate. But there are other more important realities to consider. The global economic collapse that had dragged Canada down with it, the catastrophic consequences for international trade and the foreign export market upon which Canada itself depended, the collapse in both the price and the value of goods, including the grain and wheat that was the livelihood of so many Western farmers, the widespread starvation that medical reports clearly indicated but which the national statisticians were apparently unable or unwilling to quantify in numbers.

These were all factors that contributed to the privation of the greater mass of Canadians to the point where for many it was a colossal challenge simply to feed their families. Bennett had

³³⁰James Struthers. "Great Depression". *Historica Canada*, 2015
<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/great-depression/>

already admitted to the Imperial Conference that Canada could not afford to sever itself from Soviet oil, because Canada itself could not produce enough oil to sustain its economically damaged industry. But as for the fact that Bennett's attempts at embargo never came to encompass wheat from the Soviet Union, we might conclude that by Bennett's logic, admitting to Canada foodstuffs of significantly lower price than those grown in Canada may have been the only way he could foresee that Canadians living with malnutrition might have any hope at accessing basic sustenance in a severely deprived atmosphere.

That Bennett only ever even attempted a partial embargo on Soviet goods (and even his first attempt provoked the overt hostility of Moscow) may have indicated that he feared any attempts to increase a confrontation with the Soviets would have jeopardized Canada's access to the fuel it desperately needed. With the economic climate of the period as context, it might not be unrealistic to assume that Bennett simply came to the realization that he was unable to create a healthy, entirely self-sufficient economy in Canada after closing itself off completely to a belligerent but nevertheless essential trading partner.

These facts by themselves might be adequate to explain Bennett's decisions, but there is still more compelling evidence that his actions stemmed from a desire to placate the economic interests of his constituents (with more success than his original plans to remove the threat posed by "dumped" Soviet produce.) While Andrew Cairns had originally believed that the cheapness of Soviet produce made it a direct threat to the agricultural output of Western countries, apparently he had changed his assessment by the time of some of his later reports issued in 1932,

asserting that the Soviet system of agriculture had been reduced to such a chaotic state by Stalin's policies³³¹.

This information only served as further encouragement to speculate in Soviet grain without fear of damage to the Canadian economy. It would explain why at the Imperial Economic Conference of 1932, as reported by the *Toronto Daily Star* on Friday, July 29th of that year, while Bennett and the Australian delegate Stanley Bruce were in favour of preferential tariffs to promote wheat from British dominions above all others, the reaction of Canadian wheat growers and wheat agencies represented at the conference was one of indifference³³². Bennett, for all the determination he possessed and the vision he held in his mind, could not help but take notice of this. His suggestion was, it turns out, one of the last desperate and futile attempts he made to resist a wave of resistance to his plans from the rest of Canada's politicians and business community. One July 27th, 1932, the *Globe and Mail* paraphrased the *Chicago Daily Tribune's* report that the Canadian government had dropped all plans to tax any foreign grain imports at all. The decision had come shortly after the British government had passed a similar resolution. As the article put it, the decision was

due to the realization by the Canadian growers that such a tax or preference would do the Canadian farmers no good....If Canada secured all of Britain's demand for wheat it would absorb only one third of her crop, leaving Canada to sell the other two thirds in the open market of the world. It was brought out that retaliatory tariffs might be slapped on Canada's wheat by other nations, which would cost her more than she gained by grabbing an additional share in the British market"....The "about face" on wheat is regarded as a defeat for Premier R.B. Bennett, who had hoped to use wheat as a bargaining point for a greater share of the dominion's markets for her manufacturers.³³³

³³¹Black, 100.

³³²All Sections of Empire Have Laid Cards On Table", *Toronto Daily Star*, 29 July 1932.

³³³William Marchington, "Britain Offers Trade Concession To Canada". *The Globe and Mail*, 27 July 1932.

It was clear that Bennett's vision was at odds with the economic interests of his constituents, and he was forced to admit defeat. And other reports at the time testify to the fact that there was simply too much profit to be gained from the international grain trade for any politician to restrict its flow and stay in office. It would take only roughly a year after Canada's attempts at an embargo on Soviet goods had faltered for the gains to become truly evident. On May 29th, 1934, the *Globe* reported that following the Soviet government's first public admission of the effects of the famine, and news of droughts in the Northwest United States, the price of wheat went up to 98 ¼ at the Chicago exchange³³⁴

On July 22nd the *New York Times* reported that the price of wheat had gone up 1 3/8 cents a bushel, enabling traders to sell it at a profit³³⁵. Then there was the *Wall Street Journal*, which commented in its column "The Commodity News Gossip" on November 14. It projected that Canada stood to exceed its primary agricultural competitors of Australia and Argentina in the international export of wheat in terms of sheer quantity, thereby placing other countries in a position where they would be compelled to purchase Canadian wheat at pegged prices³³⁶. On one matter both the farmers of Canada and the speculators involved in the international grain trade were reaching an increasing consensus-it would be distinctly detrimental for any government to interfere in their trade, and Bennett found he had no choice but to oblige them. Suddenly any sort of moral outrage at trading in produce with Stalin's regime had been superseded by the desire to preserve profits in an economically uncertain age.

³³⁴Wheat Goes Up As Crops Fail in U.S., Russia". *The Globe*, 29 May 1934.

³³⁵"Grains Go Higher As Rains Hold Off". *The New York Times*, 22nd July 1934.

³³⁶John I. MacFarland, "The Commodity News Gossip: Starring Canada?". *Wall Street Journal*, 14 November 1934.

Such was the failure of the British Commonwealth's attempt to call Stalin's Soviet Union to account for its crimes that no international objections were raised when the USSR was invited to the World Economic Conference in London in June-July 1933, the first such major international event to which Soviet representatives had been invited³³⁷. Ultimately, the task of drawing attention to the famine was to fall to the Ukrainians themselves. In September of 1933, months after the London World Economic Conference and the Canadian and British political debates over trade with the USSR, Ukrainian politicians sent representatives of their organization, Ukrainian Civic Committee to Rescue Ukraine, to Switzerland in an effort to raise the matter of the famine at the annual Congress of European Nationalities.

On September 16, Ukrainian activist Maria Rudnytska presented a report on the famine to the Congress' inaugural session. The Congress, after agreeing with the report's assertion that the famine did indeed exist, then passed a resolution requesting that the presidium hand this report directly to the President of the League of Nations Council, in spite of an earlier assertion that the matter was outside their jurisdiction³³⁸. A private session of the council was held on September 29. In spite of the fact that the representatives of Ireland, Germany and Spain offered to have their countries donate to famine relief, the League Council declared they had no authority to act directly. Ultimately they suggested that the task be left to the Red Cross³³⁹.

When, after this event, appeals for famine relief were sent by Ukrainian-Canadians and Ukrainian-Americans to U.S. President Roosevelt's Secretary of State Cordell Hull, he replied that there were no measures the American government could use to alleviate the suffering of the

³³⁷Andriy Rybak. *The Holodomor of 1932-1933 and reaction to it in the West*. National University of the Ostroh Academy. Ostroh, Ukraine, 2004, 1.

³³⁸I. V. Hyrshko, *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears: The tragedy of Ukraine in 1933 seen 30 years later (1933-1963)*. New York, 1963, 34.

³³⁹Rybak, 1.

victims. This assertion was repeated in the official State Department response³⁴⁰. Though Ukrainians settled in various countries attempted to advocate on their peoples' behalf, it would appear that Great Britain and Canada were far from the only governments unwilling to take a stand in the face of Stalin's abuses. Whether or not these governments' assertions that it would be impossible to take direct action were influenced by their desire to continue trade with the USSR (as the British and Canadians wished to do) or a conviction that any attempt to take action in the face of Stalin's policies would be futile is ultimately up for speculation.

³⁴⁰Rybak, I.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have glimpsed here how world events, economic and geopolitical realities affected the government of Canada's relationship with the nation's own Ukrainian minority and with the Ukrainian people as a whole, especially in the context of Canada's economic and political relationship with the early Soviet Union. Though many welcomed the arrival of Ukrainian settlers of the prairies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, nativism and xenophobia directed against them was still widespread enough that it contributed to many Ukrainians being interned by the government as the result of the First World War and the Russian Revolution. Official suspicions and fears that Ukrainians who displayed overt pride in their cultural heritage were inherently disloyal or agents of communist revolution lingered to some extent even after the internment ended. These fears pervaded the RCMP and to some extent even held sway in Ottawa.

But this history of a tense relationship between the Ukrainians and the Canadian government is in itself not a sufficient explanation for Ottawa's response to the Holodomor. Despite his distrust of Ukrainian nationalists, Bennett still was willing to pay attention to their reports detailing the suffering of their ancestral homeland when pondering his anti-Soviet actions. Neither Ottawa nor London had access to the internal documents of Josef Stalin's Kremlin in which the deliberate mass starvation of the Ukrainian people was planned out, nor did they have access to the minds of Stalin or his subordinates that concluded such a course of action was necessary to quell the threat of Ukrainian rebellion. And yet the journalists and emissaries from Canada, Britain and other nations who witnessed the starvation for themselves had plenty of evidence to suggest that the famine's origins were not rooted in mere natural catastrophe. Their dispatches were duly relayed to the British and Canadian governments.

But even as Britain sought to prioritize trade in the exports of its own colonies and dominions, and even as R.B. Bennett remained committed to a program of staunch anti-communism, it was an unwillingness to jeopardize their national economies by undermining profitable foreign trade that prevented them from taking meaningful action. It was theoretically possible to rebuke the USSR by ceasing the purchase of its exports and by using filing complaints against the conduct of the Soviet regime via the League of Nations. It was possible for Britain and its dominions to involve themselves more directly in famine relief measures. But these governments proved unwilling to take action (however successful it might have been), and thus no meaningful steps were taken that might have significantly minimized the suffering of millions of starving Ukrainians. In time it would become apparent that no other nation outside the Soviet Union was prepared to make a concerted effort to come to the Ukrainians' aid.

The narrative of the Anglo-Canadian response to the Ukrainian famine in the Soviet Union is a discouraging one. It is the story of two governments who became quite well-informed and very much aware of the fact that the government of a nation-state which they regarded as an important partner in international trade was perpetrating a vast and premeditated crime against humanity. But just as the Soviet leadership regarded their terrorizing of the Ukrainian people with starvation as a necessary and justifiable course of action for political and economic reasons, so too did the governments of Great Britain and Canada find themselves unable to offer up noticeable protest or take action in the face of the Soviet Union's aggression against its own people.

For reasons of economic pragmatism in an era of global economic instability, they realized that even as the truth about Stalin's crimes horrified them, and even though in Canada's case the Soviet regime itself was regarded with outright hostility by Canada's leadership, they

could not sever their trade relations with the Soviet Union without facing economically disastrous consequences. It is a fitting demonstration of the trials and tribulations inherent in trying to reconcile realpolitik with the most basic standards of morality, a reconciliation that political leaders too often have extreme difficulty in trying to achieve.

It is true that in the grim years of the Great Depression, many governments were reluctant to invite further economic disruption by severing ties with those nations that constituted major trading partners, regardless of what crimes their leaders were guilty of. Those who stood to make substantial profits from such arrangements were well equipped with the power to promote their own interests. By no means was it the first or the last time in history in which governments concerned about the revenue of the state or the economic welfare of the nation felt compelled to sidestep the morally questionable implications of a major deal or agreement. Yet, even considering that these governments possessed limited powers to act against a regime as fiercely autocratic and zealously determined to realize its ideological goals as that of Joseph Stalin, some attempt at action was not out of the question.

Even considering the limited success and distinct possibility of failure of major relief efforts and charity work, past examples existed to suggest that there was still a possibility of success in doing something to alleviate the sufferings of the unfortunate Ukrainian people. Whether the failure of the international community to respond with suitable impact was the exclusive result of self-absorbed self-interest, of creeping apathy, cynicism or defeatism, is a matter that can be debated endlessly.

While books have indeed been written about the Holodomor, about the Western response to it and Western relations with the USSR in the same period, and even about Canada's trade relationship with the Soviets, the response of Canada specifically to the Holodomor is a subject that has seen little discussion. This thesis has combined an overview of the tense early history of much-maligned ethnic minority in Canada, the story of one of the worst artificially created famines in modern history, the simultaneous responses of Great Britain and Canada to this

catastrophe and its relation to the economic and foreign policies of a Prime Minister to examine Canada's response to an event which up to this point few historians had ever acknowledged had ever had a direct effect upon its politics. It is a testament to the unfortunate hard truths of the struggles associated with confronting international injustice.

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