

Lecture Timothy Snyder (Yale University, Fall 2022)

The Making of Modern Ukraine

15 – Ukrainization, Famine, Terror - 1920s - 1930s

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dy7Mrqy1AY>

00:00 Okay. Greetings, everyone.

One of the things you learn when you become a historian is that most of the great quotations that people cite were never actually said by the person.

So, and the internet has only made this worse because the internet filters for what sounds right, and what sounds right is very difficult from what a specific person actually said at the specific time.

So, if you track down, like the 100 most quoted things, especially by people like Einstein in general, they didn't ever actually say those things.

Somebody said they said those things, it sounded right.

So the example I'm thinking of, I don't think Stalin ever actually said that a million lives is a statistic, and one life is a tragedy, or a million deaths is a statistic, one death's a tragedy.

01:04 He's quoted to that effect all the time, but I have never actually seen the source where Stalin says that, the primary source, and this is by the way, this is how historians work, is that we are always working our way back towards the primary sources and then building our way back up to stories.

So if I, like everything that I tell you here is the product of, almost everything is the product of somebody else's research at some time in some archive, finding things out, making new arguments, working it into a book, right? So the things that, the things that I'm trying to present to you here is general arguments, are the result of the work of an awful lot of historians, generally Ukrainian historians.

And then we try to make it all make sense in a big class.

But the reason I'm thinking about this is the difficulty of the subject today.

So our subject today is the death by starvation, or malnutrition, or hunger-related disease of about 4 million people in the Soviet Republic of Ukraine between the middle of 1932 and the end of 1933.

02:11 One of the worst manmade famines in modern history, at least, and a turning point in history of the Soviet Union.

But it's inherently hard to think about.

It's, even the number 4 million is hard to think about.

But then also, unless you've had very specific kinds of life experiences, the idea of one person starving to death is also very difficult to think about, right? And so the combination of those things, 1 million person, one person starving to death, but 4 million times, 4 million different people.

So it's a very hard reality to try to imbibe, but I'm not asking you to imbibe it now, as I speak to you, you know, just for a couple of minutes, I'm just trying to give you a sense that there are certain kinds of subjects that, you know, as humanists, we don't just blur over.

03:00 As scientists, we go to the primary sources, and we check those quotations, and we work our way up to arguments.

But as humanists, we have to be attentive to human life and the meaning of human life and the way that human life ends.

And this is largely a lecture about how human life ends.

I'm gonna begin it with an authentic quotation from the period, from January of 1933.

I'll tell you where it came from a little bit later.

The quotation is, "There are villages in which a significant part of the adult population has left for the towns to seek money and bread, leaving the children alone to their fate.

In many villages, the tremendous majority of kholkoz,' that's collective farm workers, "and their families are starving.

And among them are many who are sick and swollen as a result of hunger.

And a series of cases no help is given them since there are no reserves whatsoever.

in connection with this, many people die every day." So that is not from, a letter from a Ukrainian to a family member abroad.

04:02 It's not from a Ukrainian talking to another Ukrainian in Ukraine.

It's actually from a report, it's a handwritten note appended to a report to the head of the secret police in Ukraine.

The authorities in Ukraine knew exactly what was happening.

They were there watching it, they were there carrying it out, they were there talking about it, reporting on it to one another.

It's a handwritten appendage to the report, because it's not essential.

The lives of the people concerned, the deaths are not really essential.

It's not important to the overall five-year plan collectivization, the Soviet project.

It's just noted, so it will be known.

Which leads me to the first point that I want you to understand, which I'm sure many of you do, it's that famines are political.

Very rarely do you confront a situation where a famine is a direct result of a physical lack of food.

05:01 It's the result of a political decision about distribution, which is based upon priorities, where the priority of preserving human life may be very low, or as in this case, it may not exist at all.

It may not be a priority.

And so, if famines are political, then you know, that opens one's eyes to the possibility of how famines can be created in the present or in the future, right? So if, for example, a country invades another country and blockades its ports and says that food will not pass from these ports out into the rest of the world, that is not a lack of food, right? It's not that Ukraine right now isn't growing food, it's that a political decision has been made to try to block the export of that food.

And therefore, in the Sahel, or in Ethiopia, or in Lebanon, there might be food shortages as a result of political decisions, okay.

So, from the point of view of the Soviets, the decision to have people starve in Soviet Ukraine, we see it as political, right? From their point of view, what they think is that everything should be yielding to politics.

06:21 So this is, I mean, I'm gonna get into the details, and the backdrop, and all the arguments about this, but there are a few fundamental things to understand about the way Soviet leaders understood the world in the early 1930s that are crucial here.

One is the Leninist idea that everything yields to politics.

That an elite party, a small group of people with the right ideas can push history forward in the right direction.

That there's a natural direction that history is moving, it's moving towards socialism, it's moving toward the domination of the proletariat, and the right people can push it forward.

And as they push it forward, everything else has to yield because we know that this is the correct way that history has to go.

- 07:08 Within this worldview, it's very important to see that the individuals who actually exist in the world do not have any value.
- So, you know, you might have been exposed to some sort of human rights framework or civil rights framework, or you might think that that's natural, right? All these things are historically contingent, and we learn them or unlearn them, take them in or not, in this way of seeing the world, and any individual, any particular individual, doesn't really matter.
- Because what matters is, where we're all going to get together.
- Not necessarily us even, but some future generation.
- At some point, humanity is going to be restored to itself.
- Alienation's gonna come to an end, private property is gonna come to an end, that's everything, right? That is everything.
- The goal is everything.
- And means are generally justified.
- 08:00 And this has, this has another implication for truth, which is really important when we talk about this famine.
- So this famine is one of the blunter bigger truths of the 20th century in European history, but nevertheless, extremely controversial, at least for decades, and one of the reasons for that, is that the people who carried it out, had a specific idea about truth.
- And their specific idea about truth is that just as these individuals don't matter, also the facts as such, don't matter.
- They matter selectively insofar as they can help a narrative, right? That's what facts are for.
- But facts as such are not so interesting.
- And the narrative has a shape, and it's the shape of history that I've described before, which is that there's a revolution, the revolution is going to bring, eventually going to bring about human harmony and solidarity.
- That overall shape is what matters.
- And if it so happens that millions of people die along the way, those individual facts are less important than the overall shape.
- 09:00 In fact, if we have to, if those individual facts amount to something that we can't ignore, which is what happened in 1932 and 1933, the scale of the famine was so great, it couldn't really be ignored, then you have to argue that this was necessary, right? So at the Congress of Victors, the Party Congress of 1934, the argument that was made to great success and fanfare, was that the famine in Ukraine was part of breaking the back of the international Bourgeoisie by way of its Polish agents, and its Ukrainian nationalists, that the very, all of the pain and suffering actually demonstrates that the revolution has been successful.
- And that's a form of argument, which I'm sure is not entirely unknown to you.
- The idea that precisely because there was pain, it was therefore, it was therefore worth it, but on a grand scale.
- And then related to this, again, before we get into the details, one has to remember that if you are a Bolshevik in the 1920s and 1930s, you are taking for granted that whole groups of people who exist on the earth will soon not exist anyway.
- 10:11 So, you know, you shouldn't be caring about individuals, you should be caring about the future proletariat.
- But in caring about the future proletariat, you have to understand that the peasants, for example, are going to cease to exist.
- That's just the way history works.
- And so if they cease to exist a few years earlier or a few years later, that's not your fault, right? It doesn't really mean anything, whether they cease to exist at one point or another.

So it, so this is, I mean, it's hard to get these things across now because, you know, there are some capitalists who have this kind of confidence about the way the world works, but there's nobody on the left anymore who has this kind of confidence about how the way the world works, so it's hard to sort of think your way back into this, but if you are sure that the world works this way, and has to work this way and should work this way, then the conclusion that, you know, yes, the peasantry is doomed, I know it's doomed.

11:02 Science says it's doomed.

This is the way history has to work, then you're going to look differently upon the deaths of millions of peasants than you would otherwise, because that group was doomed anyway, as you see it.

It's not you, you're not exercising the agency, history was gonna move in this direction, You know, you're just playing your part.

So those are just, those are general things to keep in mind.

The second thing that I wanna get across is the background of the 1920s.

So one way to think about the famine is the way that I've just given you, you know, let's see the world a little bit the way a Bolshevik leader might see it.

Taking a step downwards, a little bit less abstract, another way to see the famine is as a contrast from the 1920s to the 1930s.

So the Soviets, after the revolution of 1917, were trying to do something in the 1920s, which didn't quite work out the way they expected.

12:00 And that leads to harsh repressive policies in the 1930s.

Or, in the 1920s, the Soviets were taking a kind of pause from a revolution, which they always knew they had to carry out, by the end of the 1920s, they knew that they had to carry it out.

And that revolution, the economic part of the revolution is what brought collectivization, the end of private agriculture, and famine.

So I want you to think now about this kind of contrast between the 1920s and the 1930s.

The trick to the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, as I mentioned to you before, is that it was never meant to be a Russian revolution.

It only became a Russian revolution in retrospect after it failed to be a world revolution.

And that sets up the tension, which is inside this revolution, and indeed inside this state, from the very beginning.

It was, the idea was, we are going to set off the powder keg in Russia, the rest of the world will join in, and then the rest of the world will help us take care of the rest of the revolution.

13:03 Because let's face it, the political part is the easiest part, right? Transforming the political system, overthrowing a regime, is easier under almost any circumstances than transforming an entire economy.

It involves fewer people, you can take advantage of war, and so on, and so forth.

So you have a world revolution, which doesn't help, which doesn't happen.

And you have then the need for socialism in one country.

So how do you build socialism in one country to take the slogan? How do you, now that there's not a world revolution, how do you carry out your own blueprint on the scale of the Soviet Union? So there are a few parts to this.

One part of this is you barricade yourself off from the rest of the world.

So the Soviet Union, as of the Treaty of Riga, is a state with borders, and as we're gonna see over the course of this lecture, these borders will become stronger, and stronger, and stronger, one way to do this is to not let the outside in, not let the bourgeois world corrupt you, not let in all the spies and the wreckers.

14:06 The second thing that you do is that, you take advantage of the scale of your own country.

So the Soviet Union was not, you know, the Azore Islands, it was not, you know, the Soviet Union covered, you know, a sixth of the earth, the Soviet Union was the largest country on the planet.

And so when you look at the Soviet Union, you can say, well, some of these places are, will be like the colonial periphery, and some, it'll be more like the Metropolitan Center.

That's not the way they usually talked about themselves, I should caution you, because that's the capitalist way of talking about things.

But Stalin occasionally did forget himself and say things like, What we have to do is carry out a policy of internal colonization.

The French and the British, says Stalin, have far-flung maritime colonies that they can exploit, we don't have that, but we do have all of this landmass.

And so we can exploit parts of it to industrialize other parts of it.

15:00 So you don't have the whole world anymore, but you do have a very big country with more and less developed parts, and you can exploit the less developed parts.

And then the third thing that you can do is that you can make a play for time.

So the play for time is the 1920s.

The play for time is the New Economic Policy, the trick of which in Ukraine, to make it very, you know, to simplify a little bit, is that Ukrainian peasants get to keep the land they took from Polish landlords, right? That was their revolution.

Where Ukrainian peasants get to keep land that somehow they ended up with after the revolution.

The revolution didn't make that happen directly, like, no Bolshevik in Petersburg made that happen, but it happened.

And they get to keep the land now.

And of course, they're pleased with that.

The second way you buy time is the national question.

You're aware that there is a Ukrainian nation, as I think I've said before, this kind of odd difference between the 1920s and the 1930s, is even the Bolsheviks, I mean, even the most, you know, radical, ruthless, doctrine error internationalist, of the early 1920s, like, they were aware that there was some Ukraine there that they had to somehow deal with, they disagreed with how they're gonna, but they were aware that it was there.

16:18 And then weirdly, 100 years on, when Ukraine is much more clearly there, it's existence is denied.

But so you try to buy time with the national question.

And this was not, I mean, this is an interesting policy, and it didn't happen just in Ukraine.

I mean, around the Soviet Union, it was called like, "Korenizatsiya," like rooting, in Ukraine, It was usually called, "Ukrainizatsiya," "Ukrainizing." The idea was, yeah, maybe the nations are hostile to us, or they don't know, or they don't see the benefit.

But what we will do is we will give them a kind of capitalist stage of development.

We're giving the peasant a capitalist stage of development, we're gonna let them keep the land, they'll like that.

17:00 We're gonna give the nationally-minded elites a capitalist stage of development, because we're gonna give them university education, we're gonna give them jobs in the bureaucracy.

They're gonna have social advancement, you know, they're gonna move from the countryside into the cities, right? Ukrainian writer, Valerian Pidmohylny wrote a whole novel about this.

So, we're gonna give them the capitalist stage of development, basically.

'Cause remember, the whole scheme here is that the Soviet Union has to find its way on its own to socialism.

So this has a kind of coherence.

So in the 1920s, inside Soviet Ukraine, you have affirmative action for Ukrainians as against Russians and Jews, chiefly, the Ukrainians moving in from the countryside to the cities up, up through the ranks, and then you also have a very sophisticated, very interesting movement in Ukrainian culture.

Just to name one person, if I can name, I'll just name one, which is, Mykola Khvylovy, who was from the Kharkiv region.

18:02 Again, remember, like in general, the Ukrainian nation comes from the east, that's kind of the default.

He comes from Kharkiv, the Kharkiv region, a little town, Trostyanets, I think.

In the Kharkiv region.

I should never say like, "I think," in front of the camera, 'cause now like there will be a million Ukrainians, did Khvylovy become from a place called Trostyanets or not? And is one of my TFs, checking that online right now as we speak, perhaps, yes.

So I can be corrected in real time.

Anyway, but the point about Khvylovy is that he was a wonderful writer, he was in charge of a series of literary organizations who carried out, or was in the center of something called the Literary Discussion, which was about what is the orientation of Ukrainian literature gonna be? World literature, European literature, Western literature, Khvylovy's big thing for which he later, as you can imagine, got in trouble was that, it shouldn't have a colonial relationship to Russian literature, right? It should be a literature on its own.

19:00 The second major figure of this period, whose name is on your sheet, is Mykola Skrypnyk, who was a fairly orthodox Bolshevik in most respects, but who took the Ukrainian question more seriously.

He was the commissar for education from 1927 to 1929.

He was from Bakhmut, which is, you might have heard that name, just because it's where there's a lot of engagement between Ukrainian army and Russian mercenaries from Wagner right now, that's where a big part of the front is, in Donetsk, Bakhmut.

So in the 1920s, there was a play for time with the national question, and the idea was, if we make our version of Ukraine, that will bring people into the system, and they will be loyal, and then also it will make Ukraine attractive to those Ukrainians in Poland, who you remember from the last lecture, those five or 6 million people who had reasons to be often disenchanted with Poland. Okay? The problem with this play for time is that this play for time had to come to an end.

And it had to come to an end as the Bolshevik saw it, in a certain way, which was with the collectivization of agriculture.

20:06 You know, it's, again, it's hard to get yourself into this mindset because I realize the way that we see things a century later is different.

But, if you really think that history's on it, actually, it's not so different.

Like there are a lot of people after, I mean, this is a kind of loose analogy, but just stay with me for a second.

There are a lot of people after 1989 who thought that absolutely, for sure, capitalism was gonna lead to democracy.

Like, 100%, we know it, Like, that's the way it's gonna work.

That's a little, that's of course, not true.

I mean, as an empirical matter, just not true.

It's been a great century for capitalism, but not so much for democracy.

If you've, you know, like I'm talking about like your lifetimes, or since you got out of kindergarten, basically.

Since you got outta kindergarten, democracy has been going down.

Coincidence? I ask you, right? (students laugh) So that, like, but if you've ever been in that groove where people say that like, a certain kind of economics has to lead to a

certain kind of politics.

21:02 That will help you see what they thought, which is that, there was one form of capitalist development and they had to get through it at an accelerated rate.

And so, and they could not imagine any other way to do that besides extracting from the countryside, and building up in the cities, building the factories, building the mines.

And the way to do that was to collectivize agriculture as they saw it.

Again, they couldn't think of any other way to do it.

And by the way, like these things which seem inevitable, although they're not, I mean, you could have gotten, Ukrainian agriculture would've been much more profitable had it never been collectivized, obviously, they could have taxed probably, and made more money from it.

But, you know, the things which, things seem inevitable and happened because people think they're inevitable then become models.

So just a little excursus here, the whole Chinese Revolution does not happen in the form that it happens without the Soviet Revolution, And that the whole idea that you have to collectivize agriculture as a form of development, that wouldn't have happened in China without the Soviet model.

22:00 And likewise, without the famine that we're talking about here, there wouldn't have been a similar famine, although on a much greater scale in China, a couple of decades later on.

Okay, close excursus.

So, the only argument at the top of the Soviet state was, at what time to do this, and how quickly.

And this is a very interesting juncture because in the second half of the 1920s, after Lenin is dead, and Stalin and others are jockeying for power, Stalin shows the intimate relationship between bureaucratic politics and theories of everything, right? Because what, we don't have this anymore, we just have bureaucratic politics, we don't have theories of everything, right? That's why everything seems so blah.

But so when Stalin is arguing, what he says is, "You know, these comrades, these comrades are saying that, you know, that collectivization should happen too soon.

And these colleagues or these comrades are saying it should happen too late, right? And I'm right in the middle, I've got it just right." And so this is an argument about who is the best scientist of history because it has to be done in exactly the right way.

23:13 But in fact, what he's doing is, he's getting rid of some rivals, and then getting rid of some other rivals, defining himself as being in the middle, which is, that is how this kind of politics works.

The party is supposed to represent history.

So okay, here, the sequence would be, there's history, which brings you the proletariat, and the proletariat brings you the party, and the party brings you the central committee, and the central committee brings you the politburo.

And then the politburo is then dominated by one individual or occasionally a small group, right? And so the who gets to be that one individual is then determined by these, like, who is the best at these kinds of games, which was Stalin.

But the way you make the argument is, we're talking all, and you believe it probably to some degree.

You're talking about the whole development of human history, and who is right about how to advance human history.

24:03 Those are the terms in which the argument is made.

So Stalin on the argument of collectivization, manages to consolidate power.

And this is very important because, and there's nothing solely about this, this is just normal politics, normal tyrannical politics.

Once you're attached to a policy that is disastrous, what do you do? Right? You don't say it's disastrous, you say, actually it's the triumph of human history and civilization, and so on, and so forth.

It had to be this bad.

So the fact that this is Stalin's signature policy is very important.

This is the policy on which he rides to the top position in the Soviet, in the party, and therefore in the Soviet state.

But collectivization as such, doesn't go very well.

They start off slowly in '28, '29, in early 1930, they race forward in a couple months, in early 19, in early, sorry, early 1930, they collectivize, at least according to their own statistics, about half the country.

25:02 And that led to, as we saw before, a lot of resistance.

In Ukraine, you had a million acts of resistance recorded in this period, you had whole villages walking towards the Polish border, trying to leave, a lot of resistance, including armed resistance and attacks on party members.

As we saw before, it's in March where Stalin gives this "Dizzy With Success" speech, it's in March of 30 when the Red Army is placed in full battle readiness on the western front for fear of a Polish attack.

But there is no Polish attack, right? There is no Polish attack, as we saw last time, the Poles react to the five-year plan by saying, "Wow, the Soviets state is stronger than we thought." When the Soviets propose peace talks, they accept, there's a draft of the treaty between Poland and the Soviet Union in August of 1931, the treaty is signed in July of 1932.

I mention this again because it's gonna be important for how the famine is discussed.

26:02 And so now I'm gonna let you in on a secret about how totalitarians do things.

it's really smart to talk about threats, which you have already resolved, right? You don't talk about a threat which is actually a threat, because a threat which is actually a threat is a problem for you, which you don't wanna have out there in the world.

But talking about threats that you've just resolved is very helpful because they're under your control already, and so they only exist discursively.

So that's stuff that we talked about in the last lecture, The Volhynia Experiment, the spies going across the borders, that was all very real.

But by the end of 1931, latest early 1932, that had all been taken care of, those people had gently been arrested.

The Soviets were running more spies in the other direction, they were not afraid of Poland, they signed a peace treaty.

That was pretty much done for, I mention all of this because when the famine comes, what is Stalin going to blame it on? He's not gonna blame it on a real threat, right? You don't talk about real threats because real threats are actually out of your control.

27:08 You talk about fake threats, or you talk about threats that you've already mastered because then they become, at least you think ,purely under your control.

Although, and this is now not a trick, but a reality of totalitarian systems, but not only.

Once you inject a very big lie into the system like that, like for example, that the Polish nationalists and the Polish spies are ultimately behind the famine, once you get that into the system, and people live and die on that lie, that lie can then take on a life of its own, right? As we're gonna get to by the end.

Okay, so how does the famine happen? Partly, the famine happens because of expectations.

1930 was a very good crop, the requisitions targets for the next year were therefore set very high.

And 1931 agricultural conditions, weather, was all worse, and most of the farms have by then been collectivized, and collective agriculture just doesn't work as well as private agriculture, especially in the transition year, when you're doing it for the first time.

28:13 So the famine begins in late '31 as the peasants refused to surrender grain.

Local party activists in Ukraine, completely, truthfully report up the ranks that there is

famine, there are shortages, they ask that requisitions targets be, so requisition is when you take grain away, right? They ask that the requisitions targets be decreased.

At this point, the crucial thing is interpretation, right? And here we get to a big irony about these systems, which is that they end up relying on personal explanations.

So the irony of that is that supposedly, Marxism-Leninism is a science, right? It's a science of society, a science of history.

But then if something doesn't go your way, doesn't go the way you predicted, who do you have to blame? You can't blame yourself, you can't really blame science, you can't blame the method because that would call Marxism into question, and therefore, your legitimacy.

29:13 So you have to somehow imagine that particular individuals have almost superhuman powers.

And this happens over and over and over again, those categories that I mentioned half-ironically earlier of like the spy and the wrecker, certain individuals turn out to have, you know, in order to explain these things, extraordinary, extraordinary power.

You might catch this in things that seem like conspiracy theories, right? Or the notion, you know, that people are crossing borders, right? Or that one or two spies inside the party can make a whole system.

You see this there examples all over, but in the show trials later on, when like people would confess to doing a whole range of impossible things that you have to be a super-villain to do, to be both a Nazi and a Zionist at the same time.

You know, these, and then, or you know, when Khrushchev says that the whole problem with the Stalin period was Stalin himself.

30:05 Like even that's not true, right? Even Stalin is not responsible for all the problems of the Stalin period, right? And so the way the system deals with things going wrong is actually, ironically, to give superpowers to evil individuals and to call them names, and so on.

So I'm pressing that point home because this is the way that Stalin handles in 1932, the famine in 1932.

He says that like it's somebody's fault, right? So it starts with, it's the Ukrainian party's fault, they've gotta work harder.

They're not going out there to get the food, but it's the fault of the individuals in the party.

Stalin says they have to be held, I'm quoting from July 1932, "Personally responsible." So this is, you know, this is detached from reality.

They're doing the best they can, but they're in an impossible situation.

He then moves from there to the reason why these individuals in Ukraine are not doing what they should do.

31:01 And the reason why they're not doing what they should do is Poland.

It's that they're corrupted by Ukrainian nationalists, and Ukrainian nationalists are in turn running, you know, they're being run from the Polish state, and actually, Pilsudski is in the back of it, you know, with his hands on the marionettes running everything.

Which, you know, in "Sketches From A Secret War," I make the point, this would've been news to Pilsudski, because at this time, the Poles were not really able to do anything that they wanted to do in Soviet Ukraine, and they were appalled and confused by the spectacle of the starvation that they saw in 1932 and 1933, In August of '32, Stalin writes an important letter to his, to one of the two other important members in the politburo, Molotov and Kaganovich, Stalin referred to them as "Our ruling group." He wrote to Kaganovich, his trusted collaborator, and the great thing about this period, by the way, is that people still wrote letters.

So, alright, I won't, I don't have time to wax nostalgic about the 1930s and the typewriters, but Stalin wrote to Kaganovich, "The chief thing now is Ukraine.

32:05 Things in Ukraine are terrible, it's terrible in the party, they say that in two Ukrainian Oblast, I believe, Kyiv and Dnipropetrovsk, that around 50 Raikom may have spoken out against the grain requisitions plans considering unrealistic.

In other Raikom," meaning, local regional party commissions.

"It appears situation's no better, what's this like? It's not a party, but a parliament, a caricature of a parliament.

It's terrible in the Soviet organs, Chubar is not a leader, It's terrible in the GPU," secret police.

"And Redens is not leading, is not up to leading the fight with counterrevolution in such a large and unique republic as Ukraine, If we don't make an effort now to improve the situation in Ukraine, we may lose Ukraine.

Keep in mind that Pilsudki is not daydreaming, and his agents in Ukraine are many times stronger than Redens or Kosior think, keep in mind that Ukrainian Communist party, 500,000 members, haha, even includes a few, yes, not a few, not a few rotten elements, conscious and non-conscious Petlurites as well as direct agents of Pilsudski.

33:00 As soon as things get worse, these elements will not be slow in opening a front within and without the party, against the party." So this is Stalin's personalist interpretation.

It's Ukrainian party members, so it's not the laws of history, and of course it's not him, it's not the policy of collectivization, it is that these guys are deliberately sabotaging the harvest in order to break Ukraine off from the Soviet Union.

Now, this interpretation is very important because it's not, I mean, it's not, it's not everyday reality which drives policies, right? It's, and this is true in any system, it's the elite interpretation that's going to drive policies.

And in a system like this one where there is no, like, there's no not much feedback to the politburo, the feedback to the politburo would've been local party secretaries, right? And that feedback has been cut off because Stalin says we can't trust them.

They're precisely the people who didn't take responsibility.

They're the ones who're the agents of Pilsudski, right? We can't trust them.

So now there's no way, there's no informational feedback to the top of the system.

34:01 This interpretation is what's going to drive policy.

And the policy, I broke this up into seven, It's on the other side of your notes.

There are seven specific policies which I think, clearly authorize us to characterize this as a political famine.

Seven particular things that happen in just a few weeks in late 1932 and early 1933, which mean that rather than a few hundred thousand people dying, which was at this point, like in late fall of '32, is still possible, 4 million people die.

Again, these are political choices about what to do with available food.

During this time, the Soviets had food reserves, during this time, the Soviets were exporting food, they were exporting food from ports in Soviet Ukraine at this time.

People could have been fed from the food that was, it's not that there was a lack of food, it's a decision about how you treat particular people.

So this cluster of policies, it's kind of extraordinary condensation of things that happen from the end of November 1932 to the end of January 1933.

35:07 At the first is the return of grain advances, this meant that, if you had met your grain requisitions targets that year, you were then given some grain back to live on and to plant for the next year.

In November of 32, this was reverse, which meant that suddenly, everybody was vulnerable.

But also, you have to think about what this means in practice, which is a hard thing to convey.

The famine is being carried out by, by local party members, local state officials, policemen, enthusiastic university students coming back, people who believed in the revolution, coming back to their villages, sometimes their very own villages, it's being carried out by people.

The food is being physically taken away by people.

So every one of these measures, or most of them, it involves people rushing to the village, rushing to a collective farm with the authorization to take things away, and in practice, this often just meant taking everything.

36:06 Right? Just taking everything.

Second measure is the meat penalty.

it's 20 November, if you didn't make the quota, then you had to pay your tax in meat.

And so if any of you have any kind of rural background, do you understand what that means? Like, if you are living on a farm, the goat or the cow is the kind of last resort, so you'll slaughter that goat or you'll slaughter that cow if you have to, but in the meantime, you're gonna take the milk, but if you have to, you have that meat that might get you through the winter.

Everyone, so all of these collective farms, villages that couldn't make the quotas then had to turn in their goats, or their cows.

Just to quote a peasant girl from "Bloodlands," who says, "Whoever had a cow didn't starve." Right? It's a kind of basic, but then they lost their cows in late 1932.

Third specific policy, the blacklists of 28 November, according to the blacklist, if you hadn't met your target, then you had to surrender 15 times as much grain, which of course is impossible, and was a complete authorization of all the party and state forces to come and take literally whatever was there.

37:22 The blacklists also meant that you were cut off from the rest of the Soviet economy, so it was illegal for you to exchange in any kind of way with any part of the rest of the Soviet economy.

Number four is maybe the most diffuse, but it's incredibly important.

It's the national interpretation of the famine.

And this has to do with this character of Vsevolod Balyts'kyi, who was the head of the state police in Ukraine at this time.

And at this time, later it was different, but this time, quite close to Stalin and had personal conversations with Stalin about all this.

He comes back to Ukraine in December with a message, that Ukrainization has been carried out in the wrong way, right? Ukrainization has been carried out on in the wrong way, Ukrainization has promoted the wrong people, Ukrainization has been dangerous, and there are a bunch of, so there are a bunch of details involved with this.

38:16 Like party commissions now come from outside of Ukraine to run the party.

Stalin sends in about a hundred of his own trusted people from the outside to run the party.

But the gist of it is that, now, if you are in favor of Ukrainization, you're in danger, but also if you're not being enthusiastic about requisitioning the grain, you'll be called a Ukrainian nationalist, and then you'll be sent to a concentration camp.

Or perhaps worse, right? So this whole, a right-wing nationalist deviation is being defined.

And the method which every party member would've understood was, if you don't go through with requisitioning the grain, even in these conditions, you will yourself be punished personally, and you will likely be sent to a concentration camp.

39:07 That was a standard punishment.

And you know, this.

and then with this, with the whole plot that like, also the Ukrainian communists are informed that many of them are in fact, secretly Polish agents, there's the Ukrainian military organization, which is run by the Polish military organization, the Ukrainian military organization doesn't exist.

The Polish military organization has existence since 1921, but Balyts'kyi, who was a very creative individual, explained the existence of all of these groups.

So right around, so that's December-January '32, '33, at this point, about 1 million people are dead.

But this interpretation, which says the you and the party will be punished.

That's one of the big things, which turns it from 1 million into about 4 million.

Fifth measure, 20 December, 1932 is the affirmation of the existing grain quota.

40:01 So they could have reduced the quota, nothing in the scheme of things, that wouldn't have meant anything except that fewer Ukrainians would've died.

Maybe they would've exported a little bit less grain.

They could have reduced the quota, they didn't, they forced it upon the protesting Ukrainian party leadership in late December 1932.

Number six, January of '33, the peasants were banned from going to the cities.

This is an unusual situation.

In general in a famine, or in any, like, let's say there's a food shortage caused by bad weather.

You wanna be in the countryside, right? It's always better in those situations, almost always, to be a farmer than it is to be in the city.

But this famine was different because the state had taken total control over the countryside and had been very successful in extracting food from the countryside, so you actually had this unusual situation where peasants were fleeing to cities to beg for food.

Or peasants, and this happened over and over again.

41:02 Peasants would send their children to the cities to beg, to beg for food.

Thinking that that was the only chance their children had of surviving.

So as of the middle of January, peasants were banned from doing this.

And then at the end of January, 22nd January, the Ukrainian Republic of the Soviet Union was separated from its neighbors, Belarus and Russia, it became illegal to leave the Ukrainian Republic.

So again, a natural response to hunger is to go somewhere else.

This blocking, the internal board of the Soviet Union, made this impossible.

It also clarifies to what extent this is a specifically Ukrainian event, by the way.

The fact that Ukrainians knew that if they went north to Belarus or to Russia, they'd be more likely to be fed.

And it has the same kind of irony as begging in the cities does, by the way, because Ukraine produces food for Belarus, it produces food for Russia.

But Ukrainians in this situation, were going to Ukraine, were going to Belarus and to Russia.

42:04 So by the summer of 1933, and again, we don't have time, you know, and maybe there are words, it'd be very difficult to describe what this means.

But by the summer of 1933, we're at about 3 million inhabitants of Soviet Ukraine dead.

In addition to this, the Ukrainian party itself, the Ukrainian party has been purged.

About 120,000 people are forced out of the Ukrainian party.

and particular focus is on the people who had carried out the Ukrainization policies of the 1920s.

Mykola Khvylovy commits suicide on the 13th of May 1933 after learning of the arrest, he was this very important writer, the one who led the Literary Discussion.

After he learned of the arrest of one of his friends, another writer, he committed suicide.

He would certainly have been killed otherwise, he was not wrong to believe that.

43:04 The Ukrainian writers were taken to a specific concentration camp in Karelia, where a number of them were later executed.

There's a term for this, which is the "Executed Renaissance," captures the phenomenon very nicely 'cause there was a renaissance.

The 1920s really were a renaissance.

It was the most interesting decade in Ukrainian culture, at least until 1914, at least until 2014, to the present, which is also very interesting.

But the 1920s were extraordinarily productive in basically all fields of culture.

And then almost everybody who was, not almost everybody, most of the people involved were executed.

Okay, and then a few weeks later, Mykola Skrypnyk, the guy who had been the commissar for education is himself accused the national deviation and also commits suicide.

So those two suicides are symbolic of, you know, the end of the 1920s, the end of this idea that Ukraine could somehow move forward into a communist future.

44:04 The postscript to this, as I wanted to suggest at the very beginning, is the Great Terror.

So the Great Terror is a separate chapter in "Bloodlands," and you'll read about it.

But there are a couple of odd ways in which the Terror, the mass shootings and deportations of 1937, 1938, are actually kind of an afterword to the famine.

Or they're another example of this principle that, especially in conditions of extreme tyranny, you will find yourself doubling down on the terrible policies that you made rather than altering them, rather than, you know, rather than taking some kind of responsibility.

I mean, you could say, I mean, from an ethical point of view, one of the most interesting things about this kind of ideology is that it allows you never to have to take responsibility, right? The word responsibility never appears or to put in the converse way, when people in the sixties and seventies begin to, in the communist world, say interesting things in opposition to communism, the the moral vocabulary which they draw from is centered around the word responsibility.

45:13 Which I mean, if you just sort of flip that around, you can see one of the attractions of being on the inside of this, right? That you don't have to take responsibility.

Okay.

So the Terror.

In two ways, the Terror is connected to the famine.

The first is that the five-year plan includes in February 1930, the idea of "de-kulakization." So a "Kulak" is a more prosperous peasant, or somebody whose neighbor says he's more prosperous, and de-kulakization means a kind of artificial class conflict in the countryside where the middle peasants and the poorer peasants are supposed to denounce the better off peasants, and then the better off peasants are sent to this emerging system of concentration camps in the Soviet periphery, which we know is the gulag.

46:07 So as a result of de-kulakization beginning the 1930, a lot of peasants, the disproportionate Ukrainian peasants were sent thousands of kilometers away to Siberia, to camps, for five-year terms.

Where, Stalin gets the idea, they were vulnerable to being recruited by Japanese military intelligence.

Not quite as crazy as it seems, Japanese military intelligence was actually quite active and skillful, and they were thinking about the national question inside the Soviet Union.

So it's not pulled from nowhere, right? I mean, the thing about all of these ideas behind the Terror is that they're not, they're never pulled from nowhere, they just take some element of reality and exaggerate it to grotesque proportions.

47:00 But so the idea was these peasants are serving five year terms, they're gonna be coming back to the Western Soviet Union, and they may cause trouble, right? 1931, so 1935, 36, 37.

This is one of the origins of the peasant action, which is the major action in the Great Terror.

So when you think of the Great Terror, if you think about it at all, you might be thinking of the intellectuals, and the show trials of the party members.

That was about 60,000.

The Great Terror was about 700,000 people.

The biggest group affected by the Great Terror were actually the peasants, and the suspicion of the peasants goes back to collectivization.

Or, you know, if you like, the notion that, "We did something drastic and terrible to them, maybe it wouldn't be so surprising if at some point they might wanna do something to us." That's the fundamental logic.

The second set of major actions in the Terror are the national actions.

Again, the details are all in "Bloodlands." And the most important of the national actions, the bloodiest one, which more than 100,000 people are executed, which is a big number.

48:04 Is the Polish action.

And the roots of the Polish action go back to the famine.

Because the explanation that was given for the famine was, there's the Polish state, there are Polish espionage, the Poles have recruited the Ukrainian communists, that's why they're carrying out all this sabotage.

That is not true in anything like social reality, but it remains true inside the Soviet apparatus of repression.

That story, if I can torture you, that's not how I want to put it, if people are tortured on a very large scale, according to a scheme in which the idea is to get them to repeat a certain story, like, "When were you recruited by Poland?" And so on.

then those documents become part of the internal bureaucratic reality of the apparatus of repression.

And then the Polish, or the Polish plot, although it didn't really exist in reality, only gets bigger in the internal bureaucratic reality of the apparatus of repression.

49:01 To the point that this fellow Balyts'kyi, who I mentioned earlier, the guy who made it up in the first place, right? The creative intelligence chief who made it up, he was then caught himself according to this logic.

"If the Polish penetration of Ukraine and the Soviet Union was so incredibly important, comrade Balyts'kyi, why weren't you onto it earlier? Perhaps that's because you yourself are a Polish spy, right?" So the person who invented this idea was himself executed as a Polish spy.

But that's just a, that's an individual example of a much larger phenomenon, which is that in the national actions, roughly 100,000 people will be killed as being a spy, as spies for Poland.

And this, although it's a horrifying event in its own right, in some sense also goes back to this original set of collectivization.

But it's the suspicion of Poland, the story of Poland, and the inability of the regime to admit mistakes, take responsibility, and the way that a big lie then metastasizes and remains inside a system, all of that lead us towards these events in the Great Terror.

50:09 Okay, Thank you very much.