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Andrii MikheievORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5445-3169>*Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Ukraine*

REACTION OF THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD ON THE HOLODOMOR 1932-1933 IN SOVIET UKRAINE

The article is devoted to the reaction of the English-speaking world to the tragic events of the Holodomor in Soviet Ukraine in 1932-1933. The article examines press materials and personal impressions of the Holodomor witnesses and their assessment of these events. Numerous attempts of the Soviet propaganda machine to prevent the spread of true information about the Holodomor in the English-speaking world are shown. Soviet government resorted to pressure on international correspondents who were working in Moscow at that time. Some of them agreed to hide the true scale of the tragedy while others dared to write the truth. Among English-speaking journalists who wrote the truth about the Holodomor, M. Muggeridge and G. Jones should be singled out. They were both British, both sympathized with a communist idea when they were young, both worked as journalists, and came to the Soviet Union to make sure that the communist idea was right. However, what they saw in Ukraine changed their attitude towards the Soviet government for good. And among those who decided to cooperate with the Soviet government and try to conceal the true scale of the famine was the Pulitzer Prize winner "New-York Times" correspondent W. Duranty.

At the same time, the truthful messages about Holodomor in the UK and in the USA were opposed by some vehement sympathizers of the Soviet Union in English-speaking countries, which is why the messages about high-scale famine in the USSR were not taken seriously. What is more, English-speaking world could know about the tragic events of the Holodomor not only from journalists but also through diplomatic channels, as well as through the demonstration of the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States. However, the US government, which decided to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, did not pay much attention to these numerous reports.

Keywords: Soviet Ukraine, Holodomor, famine, English-speaking world, USA, M. Muggeridge, G. Jones, W. Duranty.

Introduction. The Holodomor of 1932-1933 was one of the greatest tragedies of humanity in the 20th century, which, however, remained virtually unnoticed in the world. The Soviet authorities, through silence and various manipulations, largely managed to hide the scale and extent of the tragedy from foreign eye. This article analyzes the perception of the Holodomor in the English-speaking world, especially in Britain and the United States. It should be noted that as of the early 1930s, many English-speaking journalists worked in the Soviet Union. They were located primarily in Moscow, but sometimes traveled outside the capital to find out more about the situation in the regions. Therefore, it seems interesting to see how informed they were about the Holodomor of 1932-1933 in Soviet Ukraine, how honestly they wrote about what they saw, and how the Soviet authorities tried to influence them to silence the truth.

The purpose of the article. The purpose of this article is to research how representatives of the English speaking countries, both those who worked in the Soviet Unions as journalists on a permanent basis, and those who only travelled to the USSR for short periods to find out more about the situation with food in the country, estimated the scale of the Holodomor, how honestly they shared their impressions in English speaking press, and how trustfully their compatriots perceived their reports given the geopolitical situation in the world at that time.

Statement of the main material. In September 1932, journalist Malcolm Muggeridge (1903-1990) arrived in Moscow. He was born in England, graduated from the Faculty of Science at Selwin College, Cambridge University. For some time he worked in British India as a teacher of English literature, then as a

journalist for "Manchester Guardian". In his youth he sympathized with communist ideas, so in 1932 he and his wife decided to emigrate to Moscow¹.

However, the first days spent in Moscow, accompanied by visits to Lenin's mausoleum and the search for an apartment to live in, made a depressing impression on the Englishman. He was particularly struck by his visit to the market, where he saw crowds of hungry peasants, who "with animal despair pounced on the sausage and greedily swallowed it"². He felt that some terrible things were happening in this country and he had a firm intention to find out the truth. He became interested in the problems of collectivization, wrote an article about it in "Manchester Guardian", where he pointed out possible problems with food supply for next year. "Not enough grain has been harvested to properly feed the cities," he concluded³.

Six weeks after writing the article, M. Muggeridge found an easy way to learn more about what was going on in the countryside. Without informing anyone, without the permission of the authorities, he simply bought a train ticket and went to Kyiv and Rostov-on-Don. Extremely impressed by what he saw, he wrote a series of articles, which he sent to England by diplomatic mail in order to avoid censorship⁴. Although under a pseudonym and in a much shortened form, they were published in "Manchester Guardian" in March 1933. The author clearly testified the fact of a large-scale famine in the USSR: "The civilian population was obviously starving I mean starving in its absolute sense; not undernourished as, for instance, most Oriental peasants are undernourished and some unemployed workers in Europe, but having had for weeks next to nothing to eat". The causes of the famine were called by the peasants themselves: "We have nothing, absolutely nothing. They have taken everything away". That's why the English journalist concluded that "the famine is an organized one"⁵.

In addition to a series of articles published in the Manchester Guardian, M. Muggeridge shared his impressions with the British Ambassador to Moscow, Sir Esmond Oway, who reported them to London. He wrote about "frequent cases of suicide and sometimes even cannibalism ... cases in which he (M. Muggeridge) would have never believed if he had not seen them with his own eyes."⁶

However, in England Muggeridge's articles were met with great skepticism, no one could believe that such horrible things could actually happen, in addition, some British intellectual who sympathized with the Soviet Union (in particular, the famous writers Bernard Shaw and Herbert Wells) considered these messages as an anti-communist propaganda. British socialist Beatrice Webb publicly called Muggeridge's articles a "hysterical tirade," while others openly accused him of lying or misinterpreting information⁷.

Less than six months later, completely disappointed in communism, M. Muggeridge decided to leave the Soviet Union immediately. When he returned to England, he had problems finding a job as a journalist. Only in 1934 he managed to find a job in India⁸. As for Holodomor, despite the fact that he failed to alarm his compatriots and attract enough attention to this tragedy, he continued to believe that "it was one of the most horrible crimes in history, so horrible that people in the future will find it difficult to believe it could have happened"⁹.

There was another English-speaking person who witnessed the tragic events of the Holodomor of 1932-1933 in Ukraine. It was Welsh journalist Gareth Jones (1905-1935). He was born in the Welsh town of Barry in an intelligent family: his father was a school principal and his mother a teacher. Interesting fact that Jones's mother, Annie Gwen Jones, spent several years of her youth in Russian Empire, where she was a teacher of the grandchildren of the famous Welsh industrialist John Hughes, the founder of Yuzivka (Donetsk). G. Jones studied at universities of Wales, Cambridge and Strasbourg, where he mastered French, German and Russian. In 1930, he became a foreign policy adviser to the former British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, also worked as a journalist. In the early 1930s, G. Jones visited the Soviet Union three times, where he interviewed

¹ Hunter, I. (1980). *Malcolm Muggeridge: A life*. London: Collins, 45-76.

² Muggeridge, M. (1934). *Winter in Moscow*. Boston: Little, Brown, 134-135.

³ Manchester Guardian (1933). *The Price of Russia's 'Plan'; Virtual Breakdown of Agriculture; Officials Shot; The Problem of Food Supplies*. 1, 2 Jan., 9.

<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002942/19330102/226/009>> (2021, September, 20).

⁴ Hunter, I. (1980). *Malcolm Muggeridge: A life*. London: Collins, 83.

⁵ Manchester Guardian (1933). *The Soviet and the Peasantry; An Observer's Notes; I. Famine in North Caucasus; Whole Villages Exiled*. *Manchester Guardian*, 25 March, 13.

<https://www.garethjones.org/soviet_articles/soviet_and_the_peasantry_1.htm> (2021, September, 18).

⁶ British Embassy Dispatch, 21 March 1933. As cited in: S. J. (1990). *Stalin's Apologist*. Oxford University Press, 205-206.

⁷ Hunter, I. (1980). *Malcolm Muggeridge: A life*. London: Collins, 84.

⁸ *Ibid*, 85.

⁹ *Ibid*, 86.

many prominent Soviet figures, for example Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya¹. Right after his first trip to the USSR in 1930 G. Jones soberly assessed the situation in the country, writing from Berlin in a letter to his parents that "Russia is in very bad state, rotten, no food, only bread, oppression, injustice, grief", and predicted that "the winter is going to one of great suffering there and starvation"².

The Welshman visited the Soviet Union for the second time in a year at the request of a leading American public relations expert, Dr. Ivey Lee. At his request, G. Jones accompanied young man Jack Heinz on this trip who was a heir to the owner of the Pittsburgh Food Corporation. He copied the abundant diaries of the Welshman and published them in early 1932 after returning to the United States³. This work provides a lot of interesting observations and many dialogues that G. Jones had with ordinary people. In particular, while visiting one of the collective farms, the Welshman recorded the following words of a young 25-year-old girl: "When will our misfortunes end? We have suffered and suffered so much. We continue to hope that there will be war – then there will be an uprising. They took our cow away. Now we have nothing at all. Our land was taken away and we were forced to work here. They don't give us anything. We work twelve hours a day. Now it's a thousand times worse than ever, we are given a minimum amount of milk and not enough bread, only half a kilo a day, and no meat"⁴.

At the end of their one month-long stay in the USSR, the foreigners also visited Ukraine, in particular Zaporizhia, Dniproges, the German colonist collective farm, Kharkiv, and Kyiv. In Kharkiv, G. Jones remembered "the tallest buildings in Russia – both residential and government, and large factories, with adjacent apartment buildings for workers". However, there he heard about "cholera and dysentery epidemic", "terrible working conditions and food that was worse than a year ago"⁵. Kyiv, "a charming old town with many ancient churches and beautiful tree alleys", pleasantly impressed foreigners, they also liked a hotel "in the Baroque style", as well as the fact that in the sports park there is a modern restaurant that makes you believe you are in Europe"⁶.

In the autumn of 1932, rumors began to circulate in Europe about a poor harvest in the USSR and a possible famine. G. Jones, who was well aware of the situation in the Soviet Union, did not doubt it for a moment. On September 14, in a letter to his former employer, I. Lee, he wrote: "The harvest has been unsuccessful, and it is possible that millions of people will be starving this winter. At the moment, there is already a famine in Ukraine"⁷.

Wanting to assess the food situation in Ukraine with his own eyes, G. Jones decided to make another trip to the USSR. This was facilitated by the fact that in early 1933 he toured Europe, in particular, in February he was honored to become the first foreign journalist to fly on the same plane with Adolf Hitler who was meeting with voters in Frankfurt⁸.

In early March 1933, G. Jones went from Germany to the USSR, first to Moscow, where he tried to find out the truth from foreign correspondents there, and then, just like M. Muggeridge, without prior permission of the Soviet authorities, came to the Ukrainian SSR, namely to Kharkiv, and walked through the surrounding villages, where he witnessed the terrible events, which he recorded in detail in his diary⁹. Right after that he left for Berlin, where on March 29, 1933, he convened a press conference, which materials were reprinted by many British and American publications, including "New York Evening Post", "Chicago Daily News", "The Sun", "The Morning Post", "Daily Express", "The Yorkshire Post", "London Evening Standard", "Manchester Guardian", "New York Times" etc. Here are some excerpts from "Manchester Guardian": "I walked alone through villages and twelve collective farms. Everywhere was the cry, "There is no bread; we are dying." This cry came to me from every part of Russia. In a train a Communist denied to me that there was a famine. I flung into the spittoon a crust of bread I had been eating from my own supply. The peasant,

¹ Garethjones (2021). *Short biography of Gareth Jones by his niece, Margaret Siriol Colley* <<http://www.garethjones.org/overview/mainoverview.htm>> (2021, September, 18).

² Garethjones (2021). *Gareth's personal four page letter of August 26th, 1930* <https://www.garethjones.org/soviet_articles/gareth_1930.htm> (2021, September, 19).

³ Jones, G. (1932). *Experiences in Russia-1931: A diary*. Pittsburgh, Pa: The Alton Press, Inc.

⁴ Ibid, 52.

⁵ Ibid, 66.

⁶ Ibid, 67.

⁷ Gareth, J. (1932). *Letter to Ivy Lee, September, 14* <https://www.garethjones.org/soviet_articles/ivy_lee_letter_sept_1932.htm> (2021, September, 18).

⁸ Colley, M. S. (2021). *Short biography of Gareth Jones by his niece* <<http://www.garethjones.org/overview/mainoverview.htm>> (2021, September, 18).

⁹ Ibid.

my fellow-passenger, fished it out and ravenously ate it. I threw orange peel into the spittoon. The peasant again grabbed and devoured it. The Communist subsided"¹.

However, not all foreigners appreciated the tragic events of the 1930s in Ukraine in the same way as M. Muggeridge or G. Jones. During this time, another well-known English-speaking correspondent, Walter Duranty (1884-1957) worked in Moscow. He was born in Liverpool and later moved to Paris. As a journalist, he drew attention to himself while writing about the Paris Peace Conference, then worked for some time in Baltic states, and in 1921 began writing about the USSR, where he moved on a permanent basis in 1924. In 1929 he was lucky enough to take an exclusive interview with J. Stalin, and for a series of articles on the first Soviet Five-Year Plan in 1932 he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize – one of the most prestigious American awards in the field of journalism and literature. In general, W. Duranty was the world's most famous journalist who wrote about the Soviet Union, he was known in all major European capitals, was considered as an "unofficial US ambassador to the USSR", his opinion was heard and respected². It is interesting that W. Duranty, either in order to attract attention, or really sincerely chose a pro-Soviet orientation, describing J. Stalin an outstanding statesman of his time. This position also influenced his vision of events in Ukraine.

It should be noted that the Soviet authorities closely monitored all foreign correspondents who were in the territory of the Soviet Union at that time. In addition, they had a great tool for manipulating them: extending or revoking a visa that was issued for maximum six months. In addition, if the correspondent left the territory of the USSR even for a short time, he had to reapply for a visa. The delay in reissuing the visa gave a clear signal to the journalist that his articles were not considered by the Soviet authorities to be "objective" enough³.

The spread of information about the Holodomor around the world made Soviet high-ranking officials nervous. In early 1933, foreign journalists were strictly forbidden to visit famine-stricken areas⁴. In addition, at the same time in Moscow was held so-called "Metro-Vickers Affair" – a trial against British engineers who were accused of espionage in favor of Great Britain. This event attracted much more attention of the English-language press than the famine, and realizing this, the Soviet authorities threatened all foreign journalists that they would not allow them to attend trial unless they refuted the articles of M. Muggeridge and G. Jones⁵.

W. Duranty was the first to respond to this proposal. As early as March 31, 1933, he published an article in the "New York Times" entitled "Russians Hungry But Not Starving" which became an important element in denying the Holodomor on the West⁶. In this article he tried to rationally explain to the English-speaking reader the problems of Soviet collectivization that arose from the "novelty and poor management of collective farming," as well as some acts of sabotage and conspiracy, which eventually led to a "disorder in Soviet food supply." W. Duranty acknowledged that there was a "serious shortage food shortage throughout the country " in the country, but as for famine, he stated unequivocally: "There is no actual starvation or deaths from starvation, but there is widespread mortality from diseases due to malnutrition". The situation is especially bad Ukraine, North Caucasus, Lower Volga and Kazakhstan. The rest of the country is "on short rations, but nothing worse". According to W. Duranty, everything will depend on this year's harvest: "If through climatic conditions, as in 1921, the crop fails, then, indeed, Russia will be menaced by famine. If not, the present difficulties will be speedily forgotten"⁷.

In addition, W. Duranty widely criticized the reports of G. Jones, noting that he drew global conclusions based on what he saw in only a few villages, while W. Duranty himself draws information from all over the country and from many sources: "The Soviet Union is too big to permit a hasty study, and it is the foreign correspondent's job to present a whole picture, not a part of it"⁸.

When the peak of the famine subsided, the Soviet authorities decided to allow W. Duranty to pay a demonstration visit to Kuban and Ukraine on a predetermined date. He was allowed to walk around towns and markets within a radius of twenty to thirty kilometers, and to interview local officials and party figures.

¹ Manchester Guardian (1933). *Famine in Russia. Englishman's story: What he saw on a walking tour. March 30th* <https://www.garethjones.org/soviet_articles/walking_tour.htm> (2021, September, 20).

² Taylor, S. J. (1990). *Stalin's Apologist*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 29-42.

³ Ibid, 198-199.

⁴ Ibid, 202.

⁵ Ibid, 206-207.

⁶ New York Times (1933). *Walter Duranty. Russians Hungry But Not Starving, 31 March, 13* <https://www.garethjones.org/soviet_articles/russians_hungry_not_starving.htm> (2021, September, 20).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

As a result of these travels, he published a series of articles in which he described happy workers, rich harvests, favorable working conditions, and called the conversations about famine "sheer absurd"¹.

However, returning to Moscow, W. Duranty privately shared his impressions of his travels with the British Embassy, as evidenced by a secret report sent from Moscow to London on September 30, 1933. It reported on the sad situation in the Soviet village, many of them are desolate, the number of cattle was dramatically reduced, and small cattle and poultry simply disappeared, the fields were overgrown with weeds, tractors were only in few places, but even those were mostly faulty².

As for the losses from famine, W. Duranty assumed that the population of lower Volga and North Caucasus had decreased by three million over the past year. In Ukraine, the situation was much worse. W. Duranty pointed out that in Kharkiv his movements were followed much more thoroughly than in the Kuban. Thousands of peasants tried to escape starvation in cities where they "died like flies." Summing up the situation in Ukraine, the report stated: "Ukraine has been completely devastated, its population depleted ... it is possible that almost ten million people have died directly or indirectly from food shortages in the Soviet Union over the past year"³.

Therefore, it can be stated that during 1932-1933, and especially after his trip to the famine-stricken areas, W. Duranty quite adequately assessed the scale of the tragedy. However, he could not or did not want to write about it openly, fearing that he could be expelled from the country and lose the position of the most respectful English-speaking journalist in the USSR. What is more, a few weeks after his return from Ukraine, W. Duranty together with the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Maxim Litvinov made a trip to the United States, where the last details were settled before the long-awaited official recognition of the USSR. This trip was largely a triumph for W. Duranty, because he was perceived as one of the architects of this recognition⁴. A month later, W. Duranty received permission to interview J. Stalin himself, who aptly noted: "I might say that you bet on our horse to win when others thought it had no chance, and I am sure you have not lost by it"⁵.

Could W. Duranty have done otherwise? According to a researcher of his biography Sally Taylor, he had "enough prestige and popularity to have influence. Walter Duranty may have had a unique role in the history of journalism. There were many journalists before him, and there will be many after, who told their stories despite risk and consequences for themselves, people who had an irresistible urge to the truth. If Duranty, a Pulitzer Prize winner at the height of his celebrity, spoke out loudly and clearly in the "New York Times", the world could not ignore him as it ignored Muggerridge and Jones, and things might have turned out differently. If Duranty had made up his mind, he might have been considered one of the most outstanding uncompromising reporters of the century today. But he hadn't"⁶.

However, news of the Holodomor reached English-speaking countries not only from journalists. During 1933, reports of famine flowed to the US State Department from Vienna, Helsinki, Riga, Paris, Athens, etc⁷. Especially many reports came from Warsaw, the US embassy sent to the US Department of State entire Polish magazines about the famine⁸. In addition, then US President Franklin Roosevelt received many letters from Ukrainian emigrants, mostly asking for humanitarian aid to the starving people. However, none of these letters reached the addressee directly, most of them simply settled in the bureaucratic offices of the State Department. Those of them who did receive the attention of secondary officials had the following standard response: "We sincerely sympathize with the suffering of the persons you have mentioned, but unfortunately, the government does not currently have any opportunity to take measures to alleviate their suffering"⁹.

¹ Duranty, W. (1933). Abundance Found in North Caucasus. *New York Times*, 14 Sept., 14; As cited in: Taylor, S. J. (1990). *Stalin's Apologist*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 218.

² British Embassy Dispatch, 30 Sept. 1933: As cited in: Taylor, S. J. (1990). *Stalin's Apologist*. Oxford University Press, 220-221.

³ Ibid, 221.

⁴ Taylor, S. J. (1990). *Stalin's Apologist*. Oxford University Press, 240.

⁵ Duranty, W. (1935). *I write as I please*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 167.

⁶ Taylor, S. J. (1990). *Stalin's Apologist*. Oxford University Press, 223.

⁷ Mace, J. E. (1988). The Politics of Famine: American Government and Press Response to the Ukrainian Famine, 1932-1933. *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 3(1), 78.

⁸ Rosja Sowiecka (1933). *Agriculture in the Ukraine and the Northern Caucasus*, 30 September, 7. As cited in: Mace, J. E. (1988). The Politics of Famine: American Government and Press Response to the Ukrainian Famine, 1932-1933. *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 3 (1), 78.

⁹ Ibid, 78-79.

In November and December 1933, when the American government officially recognized the Soviet Union and established diplomatic relations with it, Ukrainians in the United States organized a series of marches in several American cities to protest this decision. However, the American Communists tried to thwart these demonstrations. Thus, on November 18, 1933, in New York, about eight thousand Ukrainians marched from Washington Square to Sixty-Seventh Street, and the Communists followed them, provoking and trying to snatch banners, as a result of five people were injured. Only the large presence of American police was able to avert serious clashes. In Chicago, the situation was much worse, as a result of the Communists' attack on a 5,000-strong Ukrainian procession, more than a hundred people were injured¹.

Conclusion. It can be stated that although the British and American press sometimes wrote about the fact of famine and mass deaths in the Soviet Ukraine, it was not perceived as an accomplished fact. It was an uneasy to claim that there was a famine at all. Only G. Jones published several articles about the Holodomor in Ukraine under his own name, M. Muggeridge preferred to report the famine under a pseudonym. In addition, one of the most influential journalists of the time, who wrote about the Soviet Union, W. Duranty made considerable efforts to deny the true reports of G. Jones, despite the fact that he was fully aware of the true scale of the tragedy.

In addition, the laws of the international market dictated that grain from the Soviet Ukraine would find its consumer. Then-President of the United States F. Roosevelt was mostly concerned about the situation of American workers during the Great Depression and wanted to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, which was done in November 1933². And although American high-ranking officials were aware of the famine in the Soviet Union, as information about it came not only from the press but also through numerous diplomatic channels, from letters and demonstrations, they decided simply to ignore it. According to the American historian James Mace, the American government "made a conscious political decision not only to do nothing, but never to recognize it publicly"³. Thus one of the biggest tragedies of the XX century remained almost unnoticed in the English-speaking world.

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¹ Rosja Sowiecka (1933). *Agriculture in the Ukraine and the Northern Caucasus, 30 September, 7*. As cited in: Mace, J. E. (1988). The Politics of Famine: American Government and Press Response to the Ukrainian Famine, 1932-1933. *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 3 (1), 80.

² Snyder, T. (2010). *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*. New York: Basic Books, 66.

³ Mace, J. E. (1988). The Politics of Famine: American Government and Press Response to the Ukrainian Famine, 1932-1933. *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 3 (1), 86.