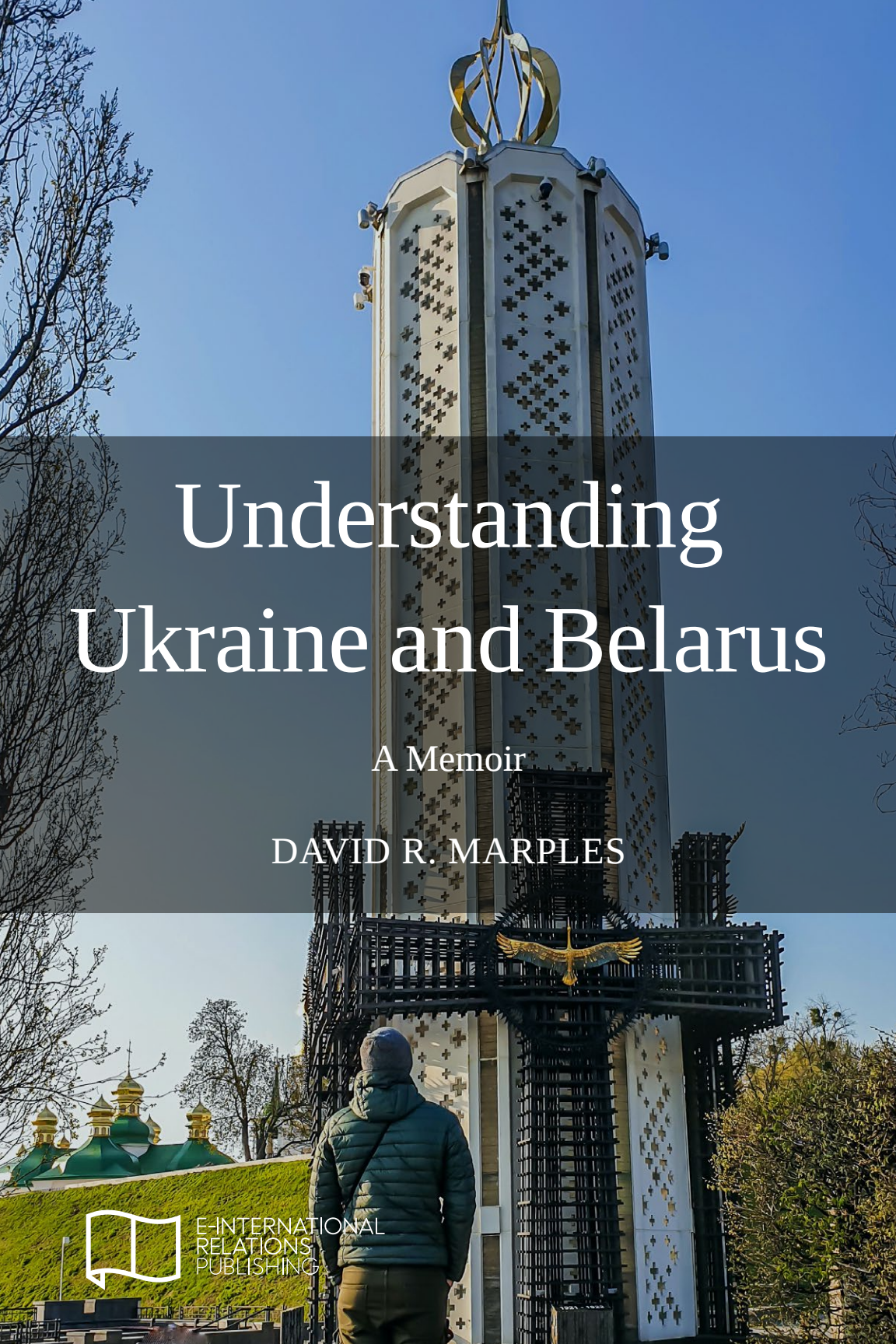

Understanding Ukraine and Belarus

A Memoir

DAVID R. MARPLES

E-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS PUBLISHING

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RELATIONS
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E-International Relations
www.E-IR.info
Bristol, England
2020

ISBN 978-1-910814-54-3

Production: Michael Tang
Cover Image: Christopher Moswitzer / Shutterstock

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

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For Carlton, Keelan, Akiko and Kaella, my beloved children

Abstract

The book describes the author's academic journey from an undergraduate in London to his current research on Ukraine and Belarus as a History professor in Alberta, Canada, highlighting the dramatic changes of the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods, his travel stories, experiences, and the Stalinist legacy in both countries. It includes extended focus on his visits to Chernobyl and the contaminated zone in the late 1980s and 1990s, as well as a summer working with indigenous groups in eastern Siberia. Visiting Belarus more than 25 times since the 1990s, he was banned for seven years before the visa rules were relaxed in 2017. In the case of Ukraine, it chronicles a transition from a total outsider to one of the best-known scholars in Ukrainian studies, commenting on aspects of the coalescence of scholarship and politics, and the increasing role of social media and the Diaspora in the analysis of crucial events such as the Euromaidan uprising and its aftermath in Kyiv.

Acknowledgements

Dozens of people could arguably be included in this section since it covers a lifetime of activity. But I will keep it relatively short. I am indebted to the two anonymous reviewers, whose helpful and detailed suggestions I have followed closely. Likewise, Stephen McGlinchey at the University of the West of England in Bristol, Editor-in-Chief of E-International Relations, is the ideal editor: both patient and encouraging. I am also grateful to Edmonton friends Terry Mackey and Rylan Kafara for reading the manuscript in an earlier draft and offering thoughtful ideas for improvement. Roma Hadzewycz, Editor-in-Chief of *The Ukrainian Weekly*, kindly allowed me to reproduce in modified form (Chapter 6), articles that appeared in that newspaper from 1989.

I do wish to acknowledge the support, dedication, and interest of my many students, especially those at the graduate level, who can happily be named. At PhD level they include David F. Duke, Aileen Espiritu, Elena Krevsky, Per Anders Rudling, Ilya Khineiko, David Dolff, Trevor Rockwell, Lizaveta Kasmach, Mariya Melentyeva, Brian Daley, Iuliia Kysla, Shona Allison, Ernest Gyidel, Frederick V. Mills, Eduard Baidaus, Oksana Vinnyk, Michael Dorman, Sean Patterson, and Anna Kupinska.

My MA students have included, in rough chronological order: Andrew Juricic, Esther Van Nes, Eva De Marco, Todd Cooper, Sean Atkins, Nancy Slawski, Brian Halsey, Robert Heynen, Roman Zyla, Miranda Pollard, Paul Pirie, Daniel Grigat, David Ryning, Kim Palmer, Victoria Plewak, Nordica Nettleton, Declan Braiden, Meaghan Bernard, Amber Rommens, Greg Fowler, Oleksandr Melnyk, Rebecca Anderson, Jordan Vincent, Matthew Ostapchuk, Andreea Resmerita, Christian Basar, Claudia Lonkin, and Jeff Vavasour-Williams. All in their own ways have added considerably to my knowledge and career. Many have remained good friends.

I would like to thank my former PhD supervisor, Everett Jacobs of Sheffield, England, for getting me started on this long road and my colleagues in the Department of History and Classics at the University of Alberta, with whom I have worked for many years, including as their Chair between 2014 and 2019. I have always felt the support of my longtime Edmonton friends Tim and Susan McRory, Donald Macnab and Susan Smith, Dennis and Patricia Edney, and Roman and Marusia Petryshyn. I hope the book is also of interest to my families in England and Japan, and especially to my friends living in what historians term “the East Slavic world.”

Lastly, I thank my wife, Aya Fujiwara, for keeping me alive, hopeful, and loved through good times and bad.

David R. Marples
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
March 2020

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Preface

In any memoir, it is always difficult to decide what to include and what to leave out. I decided to write this one as a result of prompting from some of my students who have often encouraged me to put some of the stories of my travels on paper. But no writer really knows whether their experiences are unique or common, whether their insights are in any way original. Still, I convinced myself that there were some unusual things about my own.

First of all, my period of development as a scholar coincided with the later years of the Cold War, the collapse of Communism in eastern Europe, and the fall of the Soviet Union. Moreover, I had spent this period both as an analyst and a graduate student, and began my academic career precisely during the time the Soviet system collapsed, and just a month before the failed putsch in Moscow that heralded the end of Gorbachev's leadership, although not in the manner the putschists had intended.

Second, I do think my engagement with Chernobyl and the disaster of 1986 to be something worth relating. This book contains original comments I made in my diary during the time of my visit there, largely unedited, though some of my 1980s prose seems alien and opinionated to me today. The disaster continues to draw public interest, thanks to new books and the documentary series of 2019 on HBO/Sky Television that evoked much anger in the Kremlin, but was generally lauded elsewhere.

Third, my studies pertain to areas of much dispute, and even warfare, over historical memory, which has affected and influenced many scholars of Ukraine in particular. The time period coincided with the rapid development of social media, which has meant that propaganda on both sides – but particularly in Russia – has been rife, and those expressing opinions on sites such as Facebook and Twitter are not necessarily, and perhaps not usually from the academic domain. It is no longer possible to express views that do not coincide with one or another prevailing narrative and not receive a torrent of abuse, often from people we do not know and have no wish to know.

Though Russia is a part of this monograph, the nations I know best, Ukraine and Belarus, feature most. They are starting to redefine their identities, often based on historical memory, and most often, in one way or another, the Second World War. Official and unofficial narratives often pay little heed to history. In Ukraine, memory is the source of serious polemics, arguments, violence, and commemoration and these escalated in the period 2013–2019 to levels never hitherto witnessed. With an oligarch and chocolate magnate at the helm, Ukraine's position became more narrowly defined. Russia was the

enemy and Ukraine's path was with Europe. At the same time there were contradictions because during the height of this hybrid and real warfare, Russian exports to Ukraine were actually increasing. But few noticed that or, if they did, expected it would not last long.

Western politicians, writers, and scholars came to Ukraine in this period and most embraced the uprising and perceived it as a quest for democracy and freedom, away from authoritarianism and the remnants of the Soviet past. But as new president Volodymyr Zelensky perceived, what most Ukrainians really needed were better living standards and security and less ideology or street renaming. In many ways these desires were similar to those of Russians in the late 1990s, with the hapless, absent, and increasingly uninterested Boris Yeltsin at the helm.

For my own part, these disputes have had an impact on my career and continue to do so. In one sense, these memoirs in part are a narrative of my relations with two communities: with Ukrainians both at home and in Ukraine, from one who worked closely with the community for many years and then found himself outside it, even ostracized in some circles; and in Belarus, where I have not had the same experience because the country is more authoritarian and the opposition has not had an opportunity to break out of this pattern and influence national development. And in my home of Edmonton, there is no Belarusian community conducting organized activities. Moreover, it has rarely been unified in North America as a whole since the declaration of independence in 1991.

Simply put, it is very difficult in 2020 to be an objective and humanitarian scholar, working and researching at a distance from the events of the recent past and even those in earlier periods. The overriding symbol of the current interpretations outside academia is nationalism, of many varieties, but with ethnic nationalism in the ascendancy. Fortunately, in my view, it does not represent all of Ukraine, or even the majority. And invasion of and warfare in one's country only tends to catalyze and heighten such sentiments. That would be the case anywhere, though perhaps not of such extreme varieties.

I have basically adhered to chronology in this memoir, from earliest times – in my case the 1950s – to the present, interspersing some personal events, both happy and tragic, as well as some stories that might entertain, which in their own way are as revealing about the nature of the societies described than any scholarly publication. Occasionally I have resorted to a narrative of political changes, but only to provide some explanation and context for those less familiar with the events described. If there is a theme it is of the value of open-mindedness, humanitarianism, and academic freedom in the 21st

century, a period of incomplete news and “fake” news, when information is overloaded on our laptops and phones, but it is hard to discern what is of real value. Those that have researched more deeply are often derided for their conclusions because they do not coincide with the preferred narrative of the army of scribes on Twitter or Facebook.

Universities, which have been my main career focal point, are now in financial plight in my province of Alberta, and the Arts and Humanities, in particular, the subject of severe budget cuts. In some cases, disciplines that were once taken for granted have to justify their existence, often from student enrolments or students’ future careers, while administrations of universities are bureaucratized and bloated, appealing to business and engineering students rather than those who wish to pursue studies purely from academic interest. The problem is Canada-wide. In Vancouver in the summer of 2019, I was interested to hear a university Chair of History opine that he advised students not to pursue PhDs because they had no future ahead of them should they do so. There were simply no jobs available for those completing dissertations.

I was fortunate that my introduction to academic life preceded such sentiments, and was allowed to research the former Soviet Union and publish what I wanted. My scholarly career also took certain directions that coincided with public interest, such as the Chernobyl disaster (Chornobyl in Ukrainian), memory politics at the time of Euromaidan in Ukraine, and debates on the Second World War that continue today. In Belarus, the legacy of Stalin remains strong, and my current project has set itself the goal of uncovering some of the events of the late 1930s and early 1940s, and publicizing them for the benefit of the Belarusian public, and yet recognizing that they may prefer not to know.

It is time surely to be rid of myths or illusions about Stalinism. He has left his mark on these societies along with those that followed him along his cruel and ideological path, devoid of any human feeling. That is as close to an academic “mission” as I have ever acknowledged. Historians, after all, are supposed to remain dispassionate and detached. A few of us think we still are.

1

Beginnings

This is a memoir of my academic rather than personal life though inevitably the two overlap frequently. I was born on October 17, 1952, in Chesterfield, Derbyshire, but resided six miles to the east in the coal mining town of Bolsover. My parents were both from the same area: my father was a chemist at the local Coalite and Chemical factory in the valley of the Doe Lea River. My mother was a nurse and eventually became the local Health Visitor, monitoring families with newborn babies and small children. The main cities within proximity were Sheffield, 24 kilometers (15 miles) to the north, and Nottingham, about 32 kilometers (20 miles) to the south. Outside the mining communities, the countryside was the idyllic Peak District where I spent many hours hiking with my father and friends during my school years.

I have two younger sisters, Jill and Enid, and we were raised as Methodists. My mother's brother Jim Stringfellow was a Methodist minister, as was his uncle, Arthur Middleton. My earliest recollections are of Sunday church services and anniversaries at the Hill Top Methodist Church in Bolsover, though I have always lived a secular sort of life free of the teachings of John Wesley, who left his imprint in locations as far afield as Canada, China, the United States, and Africa. Both my grandfathers were coal miners and their careers left a lasting impression on me.

England in the early 1950s was in miserable shape though we had nothing with which to compare it. The war had ravaged the economy, hitting the mining communities especially hard. An ageing and weary Winston Churchill was Prime Minister, serving his final term in office. Many people, especially in industrial areas, lived in row houses without central heating or inside toilets. During the decade, the construction company Wimpey built an entire estate of houses on the hill across the road from Bolsover Castle, an eyesore on an otherwise picturesque landscape, but the home of perhaps half of the 11,000 population. Besides the coal mine, the main employer was Coalite and Chemical Company noted above, which moved its main headquarters to Bolsover in 1952. The stench of chemicals from the valley was a permanent

feature of my early life and permeated my father's clothing.

At the age of 11, I attended Shirebrook Grammar School, not far from the town of Mansfield, and divided into a lower and upper school. Pupils wore maroon blazers and grey trousers or skirts and the regime was quite strict. The headmaster was a man called B.H.S. Smith and classes were divided according to his initials, though H was made up of those who had performed best in the so-called 11-Plus exams that all were obligated to take in the final year of elementary school. Within a year, the school had turned comprehensive, thanks to a decision by the new Labour government. The change was dramatic and chaotic. The new arrivals, mostly from the Derbyshire villages of New Houghton (usually pronounced as Uffan) and Stony Houghton, were unruly, wild, and not interested in study. It was my first acquaintance with class differences.

The new head, Geoff Cooksey, was a keen supporter of the comprehensive system. He insisted that everyone call him "Geoff," which itself ran contrary to the more formal addresses of "Mister" or "Miss," and he would personally greet us and remember pupils' names. Most of the staff remained after the transition though it was evident some had difficulties dealing with the Houghton pupils, who were regularly thrown out of classes for fighting, and not seldom with the teachers themselves.

As everyone seemed to be very proficient at football (soccer) – I had been in the team at Bolsover elementary school – I took up running and became a member of the school's cross-country team. We would engage other schools in competition and sometimes they arrived from some distance away. That allowed for some subterfuge. Our route usually crossed the Derbyshire-Nottinghamshire border through the farming village of Sookholme, and surrounded by the slagheaps of the various coal mines in the Shirebrook area. A regular ploy was to allow one of our team to take the lead and coax the other team into following him up the slagheaps while the rest of us would take the first ten or so positions to win the race for our team.

I have reflected since that some of the teaching was blatantly racist, as were most of us, to some degree. In 1968, Enoch Powell had delivered his infamous "Rivers of Blood" speech, which offered the following comment about immigration from India, Pakistan, and the West Indies:

> I have three children, all of them been through grammar school and two of them married now, with family. I shan't be satisfied till I have seen them all settled overseas. In this

> country in 15 or 20 years' time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man.

He reached the culmination point with the following:

> It almost passes belief that at this moment 20 or 30 additional immigrant children are arriving from overseas in Wolverhampton alone every week – and that means 15 or 20 additional families a decade or two hence. Those whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make mad. We must be mad, literally mad, as a nation to be permitting the annual inflow of some 50,000 dependents, who are for the most part the material of the future growth of the immigrant-descended population. It is like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre. So insane are we that we actually permit unmarried persons to immigrate for the purpose of founding a family with spouses and fiancés whom they have never seen.

The most inspirational teachers arrived in my more senior years, and two have to be singled out: Brian Silver for History and Tom Elkins for English and Literature. Silver was eccentric. He was very tall and bulky. He had a hearing aid, large glasses, and always wore two ties, each side with a different design. He based his classes on textbooks that we were supposed to read in full, but rarely did. We would often coax him to digress from his lecture into reminiscences of his days in Cambridge and various romances. His voice was like a megaphone but he was passionate about his subject.

Tom Elkins, a graduate of Queens University in Belfast – we always called him Tom – was in his late 20s and deeply interested in his pupils. He would organize trips to the theatre in Nottingham and to Stratford for Shakespeare plays. He was fascinated by W.B. Yeats, but also by the early modern English poet John Donne. Our chosen texts included L.P. Hartley's *The Go Between* and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. We also read a lot of D.H. Lawrence, the closest thing to a local author since he had lived in Eastwood in the suburbs of Nottingham, and Tom took us to see the movie version of *Women in Love* starring Oliver Reed, Alan Bates, Glenda Jackson, and Jennie Linden. It was obvious to me that English Literature would be my main area of study. I wrote some poems as well as some prose, nothing of lasting quality.

I started reading Russian literature in translation – almost always the work of Constance Garnett (1861–1946), *née* Black, who started learning Russian at

the age of 30, and then made a career of translating 19th century Russian novelists. Dostoyevsky was my favorite, and I waded through his entire collection but without much understanding of the world in which he lived. The books came in bright red colors and hardback editions and were available from the tiny Bolsover Library.

Thus far, I had never set foot out of the United Kingdom. In the summer of 1970, however, I was a member of a group selected by the Geography teacher Ted Grey to take part in an expedition to Arctic Norway for six weeks. It involved several teachers covering topics such as Art, Science, and Biology as well as the various fields of Geography. The students involved were aged 15 to 18, and we shared tents divided on the basis of gender. We began with a horrendous boat trip from Newcastle to Bergen, on which most of us became violently sick. The camp was close to the village of Sulitjelma on the border between Norway and Sweden and sufficiently remote from the nearest sizeable settlement of Bodo on the northwest coast of Norway. I kept a diary of the trip at the request of Grey, and several of us also formed a musical band, though the only real musician among us was John Walters, who later, briefly, formed his own band "Landscape" and became jazz critic for *The Guardian*.

In 1971, I started my university career at Keele University, near Stoke-on-Trent, a radical environment – Marxists, Leninists, and Trotskyists dominated the Student Union – and often perceived as an alternative to the elite sites of Oxford and Cambridge and the red-brick universities such as Bristol and Sheffield. My chosen areas of study were English and Sociology, though the entire first year was devoted to what was termed foundation courses, which could cover virtually anything. And life was about music, drugs, and religion. In my residence block we had all three in almost equal measure. My neighbor Jeff Kavanagh, from Hastings, was my first university friend, but soon began to cut classes and spend his days in a haze of marijuana smoke or on an LSD trip. Another friend, Robin Ware from London, was a rapid convert of the campus Christian Society and retained his faith. And to some extent we were all exploring music, buying LPs at stores in Hanley to hear on our primitive record players.

I stayed barely a year at Keele before moving to Westfield College, University of London to be with my fiancée, Kathryn Yates, who was studying Spanish. It proved easier to register there for History than English – I had good A-levels in English and History – and thus for selfish and personal reasons I embarked on my career as an historian as a means to an end, without any idea that it would become a permanent career.

The College – sadly, it no longer exists – was located in Hampstead, with departments based on old houses along Kidderpore Avenue and the bustling Finchley Road. The famous Heath was at the top of a long hill, and along the route was the ornate and charming Golders Hill Park, leading to Golders Green. The Department of History had superb scholars, mainly focused on medieval England. Lectures were few with ample time for library work, language study, and writing essays – two per week throughout my entire three years of study.

In the second year, having taken special subjects in the Revolt of the Netherlands and Nazi Germany at University College and Queen Mary College, I ran out of courses and started to look outside the general fields to Russia and the Soviet Union, which had become something of an obsession. Though no open courses were available at that time, Professor Martin McCauley at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies kindly agreed to set and mark essays, adding detailed comments and suggestions for further reading.

Finally, in the third year I enrolled for a course with a legendary professor, G.H.N. (Hugh) Seton-Watson, author of the magisterial *The Russian Empire, 1801–1917*, published in 1967. Though only in his late 50s at that time, he seemed much older, inspirational but fussy and irritable. He was so reluctant to answer student questions after his lecture that he would don his hat and coat while still speaking and exit the door while delivering his final sentence. If a student lit a cigarette, which was not unusual in the 1970s, he would clutch his throat coughing and spluttering “Put that thing out!”

London, it should be added, was a seething political hotbed. Britain had just entered what was then termed the Common Market, a miners’ strike was causing mayhem for the Conservative government of Edward Heath, and a three-day work week had been implemented. Left-wing bookstores abounded, some of them quite mainstream. I spent many hours in Collet’s Russian Bookstore on Charing Cross Road, immersing myself in books of Lenin, Trotsky, and others. In truth, the Soviet Union was an illusion that took me some time to dispel. One could buy copies of the KGB propaganda organ *New Times* on Oxford Street and read about the latest peace proposals of the Brezhnev leadership. Still, the legacy of the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 was still a memory for many, and probably contributed to the popularity of Trotsky in some circles, equally as naively.

At the same time the far-right National Front was holding rallies, not only in central London, but also at my College, where one of its leading figures, Richard Verrall, was studying the history of art. Verrall came to the residence

one night bearing a copy of a pamphlet by “Richard Harwood” with the title “Did Six Million Really Die?” It was a scurrilous piece denying the Holocaust of the Jews of Europe, well written but with little by the way of corroboration to support his claims. At one point I stopped him and said:

“That is obviously wrong. I don’t agree with your point here.”

He looked bemused.

“How did you know I had written it?”

“I didn’t,” I replied. “But I do now.”

He did not deny it. The pamphlet achieved some infamy for years afterward and was used by Holocaust deniers regularly. Two trials in Canada in 1985 and 1988 involved Ernst Zundel, the publisher of Verrall’s pamphlet.

Politically, I moved further and further to the left, often as a reaction to the general sentiments expressed during hall of residence discussions. Verrall would initiate late-night discussions that often lasted into the early hours. On one occasion a Polish security guard was horrified to hear the Horst Wessel song come piping out of Verrall’s room. One of my closest friends was Richard Rhodes, who like me was fascinated by Eastern Europe, though he was a medievalist who wished to pursue the subject of Bogomolism in 12th century Bulgaria as a future topic for a PhD. The two of us would become embroiled in arguments with Verrall though from different perspectives since Rhodes was no radical.

As I approached graduation, I had already decided to go further into what the British call “postgraduate” studies. I secured a position at the London School of Economics with a renowned scholar named James Joll, who encouraged me to make a study of the life of Sir William Tyrell, the private secretary of Sir Edward Grey, the influential Foreign Minister of the First World War period. I acquired a UK government grant to do so, but something held me back. Instead, I followed up a poster advertisement I had seen in one of the London colleges for Soviet studies at the Department of Economic and Social History, University of Sheffield. I attended an encouraging interview with Dr. Everett Jacobs, a Senior Lecturer at the initial stage of his career, aged 34, an American of Jewish background and a former student of Leonard Schapiro, another scholar with an enormous reputation. Jacobs was very enthusiastic about taking on a student.

But nothing was simple. I was breaking up with my long-time girlfriend Kathryn, with whom I had planned to live in Sheffield, and indeed did so for a brief, unhappy period after a rash decision to marry. Our engagement at the ages of 19 and 18 was foolishly premature though we had known each other already for 14 years and through two schools. It was a wretched period and for days at a time I got very little done.

Once in Sheffield, a city very familiar to me, I studied nothing other than languages, starting with intensive Russian. My tutor for the former at the University of Sheffield was the excellent Robert Russell. A local Latvian Jewish couple, Ruth and Leo Sobel – members of the city's Jewish community in which Everett socialized – helped me read some Soviet texts and would howl with laughter over tea and snacks at their small house, not far from the campus, at the absurdity of the analyses.

Other than Everett, there was little interest in the Soviet Union in the department. The emphasis was firmly on British labor history. The head of the department was a prominent scholar, Sidney Pollard (1925–1998), a descendant of Galician Jews who authored numerous books examining economic management in the process of industrialization. He and Everett were close friends but otherwise he seemed a remote figure, often absent on travels to give talks or for research.

During this early period, Everett and I talked at length about possible thesis topics. I was interested in Stalin's collectivization campaign of the late 1920s and early 1930s. His thesis, however, had examined the early postwar years in "Right-Bank Moldova," the region formerly known as Bessarabia, annexed by the USSR from Romania in 1940. He suggested that I choose a non-Russian region because over the coming years there would be an excess of PhDs in the area of Russian history. While studying the situation in Moldova, he had seen a number of reports on neighboring Ukraine, the western regions of which were not collectivized fully until the early 1950s. It would mean a lot of language work, but, in his view, Ukraine would be the better path career-wise.

I cannot recall how long it took me to follow his advice, but it proved to be accurate and determined my path for the coming decades. The Visiting Professor in the Russian Department that year was from Kyiv and agreed promptly to assist me in learning Ukrainian, though never in such a systematic fashion as my Russian classes.

Everett encouraged me to apply for a British Council grant to spend a year in the Soviet Union, and I attended an intensive interview in London and was

duly selected, along with five others. I had listed my topic as “Soviet collectivization of Western Ukraine, 1939–1953,” which I intended to begin once the language training was over. The Soviet side rejected my application even though they accepted all five others. The rejection did not come directly. They simply added a nuclear physicist to their own exchange list, knowing that the British would feel bound to reject their student. In turn, they removed me from the British list. It seemed I had chosen the most sensitive topic imaginable.

Suddenly, I was transformed from a student with a clear future path to one in disarray, my task seemingly impossible since I could not access Soviet archives or visit the Soviet Union. I spent a month at the British Library and read through secondary sources. I went to local Ukrainian clubs to meet with people who had left the Soviet Union during or shortly after the Second World War. In London, I met by chance the visiting Iwan S. Koropeckyj, an economist from Temple University in Philadelphia, who encouraged me to access resources in the United States, since my path to the Soviet Union was blocked. After two years, I had done very little other than language work and background reading. I felt that the only way forward was to explore what I could outside the UK.

While in London, I stayed a few days in the Liverpool Street area at the home of Raphael Samuel, having been invited there by a fellow PhD student at Sheffield from Japan. Samuel lived in a Victorian house with one room at each level and on five levels with the lowest, the dining room, below ground. He was a bohemian character who shared rooms with his daughter and, occasionally with his ex-wife. He was famous for founding the journal *Past and Present*, and the creation of the History Workshop on British social history. In the dining room/kitchen, a sign on the wall announced “the declaration of children’s rights” in the tyrannical world of parents. Dinners were feasts with the family. On one occasion, the roast beef for Sunday was left on the table on Saturday evening, and removed by the cat to the floor by the next morning. Samuel simply washed it and put it back. He was nocturnal and sat in his study most of the time pounding his typewriter, clad in denims, with long black hair and bare feet, chain smoking as he typed. He was one of the kindest people I ever met.

With generous support from my home county of Derbyshire, I secured a grant to spend four months in the United States, from January to the end of April 1978. I was to be based in Washington, DC, but first stayed for several days at the home of Koropeckyj in Moorestown, New Jersey. Through him, I contacted other Ukrainians in the Washington area. One of them, Yaroslav (Yaro) Bihun, met me at the Trailways bus station in Washington, DC, a fairly

dangerous place, as he explained. After several temporary abodes, the local Ukrainians found someone working at the Library of Congress who would rent out his basement for the time period I needed. His name was Paul Vidal, a native German and translator for Congressmen and Senators, who responded to requests for citations used in their speeches.

I greatly respected and admired Paul, who was a polyglot – in addition to French, English, and German, he knew Chinese and several other languages – and had a host of war-related stories that were simply engrossing. Though anti-Nazi he had been arrested by Soviet authorities in an East European forest and sentenced to death as an alleged German spy. He escaped and was eventually picked up by British forces. Paul was somewhat older than his wife. He would rise around 4:30 am and was falling asleep by 8 pm, after listening to Walter Cronkite deliver the news. We would drive in a carpool to the library, whereupon I would order materials. Initially, the responses to my requests were entertaining. I once received a book of birds rather than the intended Soviet source.

My path was eased by the young librarian of Slavic resources, Jurij Dobczansky, who took me directly to the stacks, after which I was allowed to wander down there alone to find materials. Jurij and his wife Olenka became good friends. I also met several scholars of Ukrainian background, including Zenon Kohut at the Library, all of whom were enthusiastic and encouraging about my choice of topic, though at times the task seemed well-nigh hopeless. My reading of the language was improving, constantly, but in terms of accessing valuable materials progress was limited. Still, I had the Ukrainian community to help me and they embraced me warmly as a foreigner who wished to study their recent past, a rarity at that time.

After several weeks in Washington, I bought a Greyhound monthly pass for $99 and decided to visit every major scholar I could find in North America who worked on 20th century Ukraine. I began in Newark, Delaware, with Yaroslav Bilinsky, author of *The Second Soviet Republic: Ukraine After World War II* (1964), and then moved northward via Chicago – with stops along the route – to Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota and on to Milwaukee, and Madison, Wisconsin. In Milwaukee, I met Kenneth Farmer, perhaps best known for his PhD thesis and future book (1992) *The Soviet Administrative Elite*. Next, I visited John A. Armstrong in Madison, who very generously devoted hours of his time to an unknown Englishman, even to the extent of lending me the notes he had used for writing his 1955 book, *Ukrainian Nationalism*, which went through several editions. At last, I seemed to be making some progress, at least in terms of examining the opponents of Soviet rule in the western regions of Ukraine.

After an endless trip from Wisconsin to Seattle on the West Coast, I moved north to Canada, first of all Vancouver, then across the Rockies to Edmonton, where I had been invited by a professor of history, Ivan Lysiak-Rudnytsky, who had written that I could spend four nights (precisely) at his home. It was the first week of March, but not as cold as I had anticipated. Rudnytsky was a small and dignified man of 59 years with a well-defined East European accent. He spoke slowly and clearly. He introduced me to the shaggy haired John-Paul Himka, then around 29-years of age and a research associate at the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies (CIUS), which had opened two years earlier. Both treated me like a future colleague, and Rudnytsky made no secret of his desire that I should move from the UK to Edmonton, something for which I had no initial enthusiasm. The city seemed too remote and I knew no one there outside my new circle of friends.

At CIUS, I met the Director, Manoly R. Lupul, at a meeting together with Rudnytsky. Lupul lacked Rudnytsky's dry humor and relaxed personality and spoke hurriedly, in short sentences. In contrast to Rudnytsky, he was a Canadian-born Ukrainian from nearby Willingdon, Alberta. A Harvard-educated scholar, he was a professor in the Faculty of Education who knew little Ukrainian when he first took over the directorship. Rudnytsky, though the obvious choice for that position, preferred to remain Associate Director, and it was obvious that there was some tension between the two.

Lupul was unequivocal: "you will be our first PhD in Ukrainian history." In his mind, the move had already occurred. Still, the contrast between England, where I could find no center for Ukrainian studies, was notable. Here at last was an institute purely devoted to the study of Ukraine and Ukrainians in Canada. I decided to give the matter of moving there some thought, though I had little idea at that time what such a transfer would involve.

My last sojourn was in Boston (April 1978) where I visited the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard University (HURI) and made contact with Roman Koropeckyj, the son of Iwan, who was enrolled in a PhD program there in Ukrainian literature. At HURI, I made the acquaintance of a number of scholars, including the librarian Edward Kasinec, Frank Sysyn, whose talk on the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) I attended, and Paul Robert Magocsi, then aged about 32, who had just published his PhD thesis: *The Shaping of a National Identity: Subcarpathian Rus', 1848–1948*. I must have been introduced to the HURI Director, Omeljan Pritsak, though I do not recall the occasion. Most evenings I was socializing in Boston with Roman and his friend Victor Ostapchuk.

I returned to Washington for the final month of my visit, and then on to

England where I was obliged to find myself some new lodgings in Sheffield. Everett was sympathetic toward the proposed migration but saw no reason why I needed to move permanently. In his view, I could always visit CIUS again. Meanwhile, Rudnytsky sent several follow-up letters. In the Department of History, he would secure me a teaching assistantship that would be enough to cover my expenses, I would have an office, etc. I applied for a visa and for acceptance in a new abode, both of which were successful. There followed an interview in Birmingham and a medical examination. In August, only three months after my trip to the US, I returned to Alberta, now formally registered as a graduate student in two universities.

2

Alberta

I flew initially to Calgary in mid-August 1978 and spent a night in the YMCA. The following day, I took the bus to Edmonton where I was picked up by someone from the University of Alberta's International Center and provided with temporary residence at HUB (Housing Union Building) Mall, which dates from 1969. HUB Mall was also intended to be the hub of the campus and a means to offset the lack of affordable housing, not least of all for international students. It forms the letter H when seen from above, with stores on either side and a passageway down the middle. At the center the pathway turns to the right to the Rutherford Library.

I was billeted in a two-room apartment with another student arriving from England. Such was my financial plight that I did not have sufficient funds in the bank to pay my registration fees and ran up an overdraft. I received an angry letter from the Manager of the Toronto Dominion Bank warning me not to let it happen again.

After six weeks, I moved into another apartment in the Garneau area and occupied the basement. By now, I had met through organized meetings a number of other foreign graduate students who naturally gathered together. They had all joined a local housing organization called Campus Co-op. We took a trip to the Rockies in early October for Thanksgiving, during which it was suggested that I should also be a member. My basement suite was quite unsuitable. The French Canadian next door, a very lively fellow, was up at all hours playing music and the smell of marijuana would penetrate my apartment. It was like being back at Keele. There was a vacancy at one of the houses in the co-op very close to campus called Laputa. I had to go through a formal interview to be accepted but it proved well worthwhile.

Once there, my life became simpler. Rent was much lower than in my basement suite, and the main obligation was to share the cooking and cleaning in the lounge area. We held monthly meetings with the other units. I suddenly had a new family, which is basically what any new immigrant needs,

though I had the obvious advantages of native language and even some history, given the British legacy and Canada's theoretical allegiance to the Queen.

Some major problems developed on campus, however. In the late 1970s, the Department of History was at its peak in terms of size with about 55 tenure-track or tenured professors. The quip was that most of the professors were tall white guys with beards and called David. It was not far from the truth. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, there had been a spate of hiring, especially in Canadian history. Alberta was oil-rich and prices were high. David Hall and Rod Macleod had been hired directly from their residences by phone calls before completing their PhDs at the University of Toronto. David Johnson, who specialized in Latin American history, was hired around the same time. A UK native, David Moss, who focused on British economic history and David Mills, another Canadianist, were later to be added. The Americanist in the department was David Lightner. The East Europeanists, besides Rudnytsky, included Ken Taylor and Martin Katz, who both worked on Russia. The Chair was a Canadianist called Robert Hett.

The graduate students all occupied windowless offices in corridors of the second floor of the Henry Marshall Tory Building, and in pairs. My socializing began in the daytime when there would be discussions in the hallway. The atmosphere was fairly relaxed. The Canadian graduate system is so different from the British one that it was difficult to adjust. In the UK, students are left more or less to their own devices. In Alberta, we had no such freedom. We were obliged to register in several courses as well as sit a language examination in our field of study, something I had undertaken in both French and German as an undergraduate in London.

My Russian class was with Katz, who used to brew Russian Caravan tea and talk about Russian political thought of the 19th century. His hero was his former supervisor, Nicholas Riazanovsky, author of an authoritative textbook on Russian history published in 1963. He taught at the University of California at Berkeley. When anyone arrived on campus to give talks on Russian history topics, Katz would always ask: "Do you know Nicholas Riazanovsky?" The phrase entered my consciousness. Twenty-two years later I was at a conference in Tampere, Finland, listening to a speaker when a distinguished looking man entered the room. On his jacket was a name tag revealing that he was Nicholas Riazanovsky. I felt honored and somewhat disbelieving to have finally seen this legendary figure. Katz, in short, was somewhat eccentric, but extremely knowledgeable. He was also the easiest of these professors in terms of workload and allowed me time to read.

One of the professors, Helen Liebel-Weckowitz, another eccentric and extroverted woman who taught European history, had little time for the British educational system that permitted students to move from a BA to a PhD and insisted that I must first register for an MA and write a thesis. I protested, but Rudnytsky saw no harm in such a sidestep. It would be natural to divide my research topic on Western Ukraine into two parts: the MA covering the years 1939–1941 and subsequently the PhD, covering the years from 1944 to 1953. Liebel-Weckowitz, with whom all graduate students were obligated to take a Philosophy of History course that rarely ventured into either discipline, also began to insist that I sit for the German language examination, even though my topic was Ukraine. She was ultimately overruled by Rudnytsky, and I was allowed to take the Ukrainian exam.

Rudnytsky was also my supervisor, both of my thesis and my Teaching Assistantship. He was quite demanding. I would be asked to attend his lectures on 19th and 20th century Ukraine and take full notes. He needed texts in English that he could read in future lectures. Sometimes I would take up to 70 hours per week to transcribe them rather than the required 12 to turn his notes into adequate prose.

In class, he would often smoke a cigarette, and pause for effect mid-sentence. His sentences were slow and deliberate. On one occasion he remarked:

> The English Prime Minister at this time was Lloyd George and the French Prime Minister was Poincare. I do not recall the name of the Italian Prime Minister…. However, I do not consider that to be the greatest gap in my historical knowledge.

I learned a lot from him. He liked nothing better than to sit in his office chair, pipe smoking, and discuss some nagging question, usually but not always about Ukrainian history. He was not a nationalist but felt that in the 1930s, choices for politically active Ukrainians were very limited – notably he had studied in Berlin after leaving Poland as a child in the 1930s, and between 1943 and 1945 worked on a PhD at Charles University in Prague, also under Nazi rule. But he never spoke of these times. He told me that some of his compatriots looked to Germany (or Italy) in the 1930s because these countries offered the best hope for future changes in Europe, both for those in Poland (Eastern Galicia) and those in the Soviet Union. Rudnytsky also had a fascination for Chinese literature. He took an unusual interest in all my activities, including a soccer team I had organized, which he mentioned specifically when writing me a letter of reference.

At CIUS, I met Himka again, as well as a coterie of young scholars at the beginning of their careers, all of whom would make a significant impact in different ways in Ukrainian studies. University students of Ukrainian background frequented CIUS. Rudnytsky's wife, the poet Alexandra Chernenko, was a regular visitor. She was a formidable figure, usually clad in a fur coat and hair in a bun, and provided a contrast to her mild-mannered husband.

In the summer of 1979, when Rudnytsky went on holiday, he and Alexandra asked me to look after their house for two weeks, which I accepted with alacrity as it would allow me access to the remarkable library he kept in his study in the basement. I spent a contented period poring through his books, which equaled in their scope any library I had seen on interwar Galicia. Admittedly, my housekeeping was an unmitigated disaster, since I managed to kill Aleksandra's prize plant through overwatering, and then I ran over the power cord with Ivan's lawnmower attempting to cut the lawn before they returned. The machine exploded leaving hundreds of pieces of orange cord scattered around the lawn.

In 1979–1980, I wrote a regular column for *The Gateway*, the student newspaper of the University of Alberta. I named it "Quixote," since I always seemed to be tilting at windmills, and I covered any topic I pleased, mostly to do with events and life on campus. The Editor was Gordon Turtle, an easygoing man with dark black hair, ably assisted by a good-humored and very talented student, Lucinda Chodan. On one occasion I scoffed at Engineering Week, which started an avalanche of protest letters. I wondered if the column would survive but Turtle was delighted. We were making headlines. Also on the editorial board was a devout Communist called Brian Mason, earnest and thin, with whom I engaged in some discussions. By this time, I was no longer the London radical and had moderated my views though I was still well to the left of the political spectrum.

Their future careers were different but all quite prominent. Turtle became personal spokesperson for Ralph Klein, Premier of Alberta from 1992 to 2006, an early populist, social Conservative politician. I was shocked at first to read statements from Turtle defending Klein's more outrageous actions. Klein cut public spending by more than 20% when the world oil prices dropped to $10 per barrel, but offered little sympathy to the unemployed despite his own impoverishment in his youth. Lucinda became Editor-in-Chief of the *Edmonton Journal*, then took the same position at the *Montreal Gazette*. Mason became a member of the legislative assembly, offering a leftist rather than Communist voice in the Alberta Legislature, and Minister of Transport in the New Democratic Party government after its surprise victory in 2014.

In the spring of 1980, I defended the MA thesis, with an examining committee that consisted of Rudnytsky (chair), Bohdan Krawchenko, another CIUS Research Associate who was formally an associate professor of Political Science, and Kenneth Taylor, mentioned above, an historian of Modern Russian military history. I recall one of Taylor's questions, which was "Mr. Marples, if interwar Poland was as bad as you paint it, why did your country and mine go to war in 1939 to defend it?"

About a decade later, Taylor left the department very suddenly. Evidently, he had fabricated publications for his annual report for a number of years, claiming they were classified documents written for the Canadian Department of National Defence (DND). The claim was dispelled by a member of DND who happened to be visiting the campus, and provided this information to the Chair, David Hall. Taylor's career ended abruptly there and then, but he went on disability leave, probably to avoid a more serious scandal.

After the MA was complete, I learned that Lupul was seeking an editorial assistant for CIUS Press. I made some inquiries and was informed initially that I did not meet the job criteria. Lupul, however, gave me a chapter of a manuscript and asked me to come back after I had edited it. At first, I was quite tentative, but it occurred to me that he would want something quite rigorous, and I went to town on the awkward non-native English text, filling the pages with red ink and margin comments. That edit – the author was in fact, and to my regret, Iwan Koropeckyj – changed my career path. Lupul was elated. He then took it upon himself to ensure that when the position was advertised, I would be the clear candidate and no Canadian would be qualified for the role. Rudnytsky was taken aback by the news and that the PhD thesis was no longer my key priority. I had to return to England to apply for permanent residency in Canada, with no indication of how long that might take.

My second stint in Edmonton began in August 1980. Lupul wanted to start me on $10,000 per year, but the University informed him that this sum was $5,600 below the minimum salary so he had to readjust his budget. The atmosphere was friendly, but the work was arduous. I have always felt since that editing manuscripts – alongside translation – is the most thankless and unrewarding of tasks, particularly when the authors are all non-native speakers. Out of frustration, I started up a satirical monthly journal called *Beztaktnist' (tactlessness)*, which focused on the Ukrainian academic community in Canada, ably assisted by two other CIUS employees, Andrij Hornjatkevyc, who served as the Ukrainian-language interpreter for Lupul and was a professor in the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies (MLCS – it went through several appellations so I am using the

current one), and Myroslav Yurkevich, a new Research Associate.

It was intended to be good humored and no one was spared. I think it survived because of the support of Lupul, who would read it in his office, door closed, with loud guffaws emanating from within. It was genuinely popular and distributed widely among the Ukrainian academic community. Some people took it too seriously. Paul Robert (Bob) Magocsi, Toronto's Chair of Ukrainian Studies, thought the issue in which he featured was part of a coordinated campaign against him led by Lupul. That stemmed from events around Magocsi's hiring in 1980, about which I knew nothing – Rudnytsky later provided me with some details. I discovered Magocsi's concerns about *Beztaktnist'* only when I read his memoirs in 2019.

The noted Edmonton author Myrna Kostash also objected to a sarcastic portrayal of Edmonton feminists as pot-smoking misandrists, though her partner Jars Balan, took it in very good humor. No doubt today such a pamphlet might not survive because campuses are much more sensitive, but it was only ever intended to be an internal affair.

After six months or so in my new position, I started to communicate once again with Everett Jacobs. I had almost abandoned the PhD thesis, but he assured me that I was still registered at Sheffield, had completed the necessary course work, and could always suspend my registration for a couple of years before returning to it. I saw plenty of Rudnytsky while at CIUS, and he was a regular attendee of seminars, where he would enter late and noisily fiddle with his briefcase, appear to fall asleep, and then ask some erudite question that threw the speaker off guard. By now, he and Lupul had parted company and were not on good terms. It was evident that Lupul was irritated by the "European" Ukrainians who considered themselves better educated, while Rudnytsky considered him a power-hungry administrator. Perhaps that is a simplification but there was no question about the animosity between them.

Though Rudnytsky would have liked me to continue with my PhD at Alberta, I was happy with a regular wage and daunted by the heavy course work and comprehensive examinations that would surely delay completion. I also felt I owed something to Everett who had been an inspirational supervisor and had provided me with numerous materials about Western Ukraine through his trips to Moldova and Moscow. I began, tentatively, to return to the thesis.

In this same period, I married a former Campus Co-op housemate, Lan Chan, and we had a son, Carlton, born in September 1983. Lan was born in China but had come to Canada as a 12-year old with her family. I was happy at

home and frustrated at work, but Everett had left me a loophole should I wish to return formally to academia. In the CIUS main office, I was allowed to use the computer after hours, an ancient affair at that time – one typed green text on a black background onto a huge machine. I would sit in the secretary's chair typing away, usually with Lupul for company because he kept late hours in his office opposite.

In 1983, CIUS, on the initiative of Krawchenko, was commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Ukrainian famine, with a conference and other events. Since I was one of the closest to the field I was invited to speak in Edmonton City Centre when the Ukrainian Self-Reliance League unveiled a monument outside City Hall, which in shape was like a compact disc with an incision in the top, and read "In memory of the millions who perished in the genocidal famine inflicted upon Ukraine by the Soviet regime in Moscow 1932-1933." The monument was one of the first anywhere to use the term "genocide." Krawchenko, together with Roman Serbyn of the University of Quebec, edited a book based on the conference, on which I had worked as the main editor for many hours.

At this time, the Soviet Union still denied the very existence of a famine, let alone a genocide. I had a series of exchanges with the bilingual Kyiv newspaper, *News from Ukraine*, which was directed toward Ukrainians living abroad, as well as the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa, which would admit only that there were some "food difficulties" during these years. In the early 1980s, the Ukrainian Communists were still active, and any group visiting from Ukraine would contact these people first and take part in their events. For others, Soviet Ukraine was a distant alien world.

In March 1983, James E. Mace was asked to come to Edmonton to give the annual CIUS Shevchenko Lecture on the 1932–1933 Famine. Mace had written about the subject for his PhD thesis on Ukrainian National Communism and subsequently assisted Robert Conquest, who had been commissioned by the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard University to write the first major work in English on the topic (more recently that role has been filled by Anne Applebaum), eventually published in 1986 under the title *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine*. Mace was a brash young man of 31, with slicked black hair and an Oklahoma drawl. He could be entertaining and outrageous at the same time. In 1983, in Ukrainian circles, he was becoming someone of significance. But he was unpredictable.

The morning after his Shevchenko Lecture I came into the CIUS office where there was visible consternation.

"Where is Mace?" I was asked.

"I don't know," I responded.

"He is supposed to be in Saskatoon to give a talk tonight but he wasn't on the plane."

At some point one of the secretaries opened the door to the CIUS Library. There was Mace, asleep on the sofa. He had not returned to his hotel after a night of socializing. He was soon hustled into a car, taken to the airport and sent to his next destination of Winnipeg, Manitoba.

At Christmas, the Lupuls always held a party at their home, and his wife Natalia would cook roast beef. White wine was generally stored in the snow outside the back door and several trips were made to find it. Lupul loved to sing, and after a martini or two would burst into song, with Hornjatkevyc and others backing him up. In full song, they resembled a Welsh choir and it was moving to listen to. Lupul would hold forth on subjects close to his heart: multiculturalism, visible minorities – by which he meant Ukrainians in Canada – and the Anglo-Celtic establishment. But he was a committed and passionate Canadian, perhaps the key difference between he and Rudnytsky, who never seemed like he belonged on the Prairies. Moreover, I felt at this time very much part of a protected elite, a team of scholars working on an enterprise. Professor of Ukrainian Literature Danylo Struk was the able lieutenant and generally visited from Toronto several times per year.

Lupul's priorities at CIUS were the Encyclopaedia of Ukraine project, on which Struk took the lead either from Toronto or Sarcelles (Paris), CIUS Press, and the Newsletter. Emphasis in practice was roughly equal. In Edmonton, we had little to do with the Encyclopaedia, which like the *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, was edited and published in Toronto. The Press, which concerned my own tasks, was always key. Manuscripts piled up because there were not enough editors to deal with them. Most came to me – those in Ukrainian went to Myroslav Yurkevich. Koropeckyj wrote to me urgently in the early 1980s: "Please take my manuscript off bottom of pile and put on top, or however you make your editorial decisions."

I complied, feeling that I owed him a lot. Few of the manuscripts would gather much public interest beyond the narrow world of Ukrainian studies, such as a Ukrainian folk tales volume or John Basarab's authoritative but rather tedious volume on *Pereiaslav 1654*. An exception was Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak's *Feminists Despite Themselves* about the women's interwar movement among Ukrainians living in Eastern Galicia, which eventually

appeared during my second spell at CIUS, in 1988.

Lupul's chief concern was a manuscript on Ukrainian life in Canada by Vasyl Czumer, translated from the original Ukrainian. The book was ready for printing when I overheard a phone call involving Lupul and the question: "He's gone and changed his name to what?"

The book had to be recalled at the galley proof stage and reissued under the name William A. Czumer, at the request of the author's estate. It appeared in 1981 and is still a key text, distributed, for example, at the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village near Edmonton.

We also published several CIUS conference series related to Ukrainian relations with Russians, Jews, and Poles, each in separate volumes and after lengthy editing. I had particular problems with *Ukrainian-Jewish Relations*, edited by Howard Aster and Peter J. Potichnyj. The Newsletter, which was a bilingual English-Ukrainian affair, caused the most problems. Lupul would go through the English edition, muttering to himself:

"If this ever got out, we would be the laughingstock of the Ukrainian community." The offending sentence might lack a comma after an introduction such as "In 1981." Or the dates might be reversed between American and British style. The Ukrainian edition was in the hands of Andrij Hornjatkevyc, and as Lupul could not read that language very well, progress was simpler. The Newsletter, simply put, was CIUS speaking to the community and beyond, whereas errors in books could be attributed to the neglect of individual authors.

I never followed closely the progress of multiculturalism in Canada, which was clearly Lupul's prime concern. He was always politically active, often angry, but committed, and very determined. Together with his friend Peter Savaryn, his campaign was largely successful, at least in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In 1982, Savaryn, a city lawyer, was appointed Chancellor of the University of Alberta, a significant achievement in which Lupul and CIUS played important roles as nominators. Savaryn was as active as Lupul, though whereas Lupul politically was linked to the Liberal Party, Savaryn was a Conservative. In his youth he had joined the Ukrainian Waffen SS Division in his native Galicia, and he was more nationalist than most others around in the early 1980s, with one exception, a notable figure named Yar Slavutych.

Slavutych (1918–2011) is best remembered for his book *Conversational Ukrainian*, which I used myself when my neighbor Halyna Freeland, an Edmonton lawyer, volunteered to work with me to improve my spoken

Ukrainian. But much about him remains a mystery, including his real name. In his obituary, published in legacy.com, it states that he was born in Blahodatne in central Ukraine and that many in his family died in the Holodomor. Presumably, he moved westward with the Soviet advance because he became displaced after the war. He moved to the US in the 1940s and ultimately became a Professor in MLCS until his retirement in 1988. He was a well-known Ukrainian-language poet.

After 1983, Slavutych claimed to have been a famine victim and on a mission to tell the story to the world. The *Edmonton Journal* once carried a vivid narrative of Slavutych fleeing from the German occupants, with one sentence ending "with the Nazis on his tail, Slavutych fled to Berlin." Slavutych was an imposing figure, balding with large eyeglasses, who would invariably be in one of the front seats of every CIUS seminar. Jars Balan related a story of the time he did some research work for Slavutych, at the end of which the professor promised the student a gourmet meal as payment. When the day duly came, Jars recalled his surprise as Slavutych's car approached the familiar yellow arches: "Very good food and fast service," was Slavutych's comment.

Thus, I was now working in an exclusively Ukrainian environment, in which the Ukrainian language was used daily by most people around me. In some ways it was a stopgap position in that it was never my intention to make a career as an editor. I had a young family and we needed regular wages. To what extent I was part of the community was never made clear, but the atmosphere was cordial. Moreover, CIUS had received a number of endowments, which added to its budget from the university made it a relatively affluent institution. It reported formally to the Associate Vice-President (Research), but the subordination was ritualistic. In practice, no one bothered us. Lupul was free to forge his own path and operated as a sort of benign authoritarian, short tempered, but very considerate of those within his entourage.

Eventually, however, I had a draft of my thesis that was considered defendable by Everett and sent it to the UK. It was well over 600 pages. Later in the year I was invited to the defense in Sheffield. Besides Everett, the examiners were Julian Birch of the Department of Political Science and Peter Wiles of the London School of Economics, a formidable but irascible scholar and one that would not have been my first choice. Initially, only Birch asked questions, all of which were pertinent and to which I was able to respond fully. Wiles burst into life after about an hour, asking about Hutsuls and *khutors*. How could they be collectivized given their location in the mountains? The discussion seemed endless but I got the impression he was not entirely

satisfied with my responses. In truth, I had written very little about the Hutsuls since the focus was on the main grain-growing areas in the Galician regions of Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk (then Stanislav), and Ternopil. After three hours, I received a "pass" but with revisions.

Before sending Wiles my thesis I had bound it in a brown cover and sent it to him via a visiting friend also working on a PhD from the University of Sheffield, who was able to take it to him personally. As we descended the elevator he remarked: "There I was staggering around London with this ruddy great brown fucker under my arm." Thus, all my labors were encapsulated in one phrase, "brown fucker." There was still much work to do. Shortly thereafter, Everett Jacobs left academia and moved into business with his wife. The Department of Economic and Social History was soon merged with History; thus I was one of its last PhDs. During the period of making final changes, Anthony Sutcliffe, an urban historian far from my field, was assigned as my supervisor.

In the spring of 1984, I received a phone call from Roman Solchanyk, who was working at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) in Munich. He was seeking a Research Analyst on Ukraine and I seemed like a possible choice. I flew to Munich shortly afterward for an interview at the tightly guarded former psychiatric hospital on the edge of the beautifully laid out Englischer Garten. The situation seemed ideal. The wages were outstanding, RFE/RL would pay to transport my family and all our belongings to Munich and I could work full-time on contemporary Ukraine. Thus, it was an easy decision to make the move. With my thesis almost completed, I felt in a good position to support my small family and broaden my knowledge of Ukrainian topics. Moreover, I was weary of editing other people's manuscripts.

During this same period, Ivan Rudnytsky died. I do not recall where I was precisely at the time other than that I was not in Edmonton. He had suffered a heart attack at the age of 64, a tragic loss of a scholar who was to become better known after his death – especially in Ukraine – than he was during his lifetime. His protégé, John-Paul Himka, wrote the following about him in a tribute, which was published in the Kyiv journal *Krytyka* in November 2014:

> I had seen him a day or two before his death, visiting him in the University of Alberta Hospital, where he seemed to be recovering successfully from a heart attack. He had at his bedside a volume of ancient Chinese stories in German translation. He had loved belles lettres his whole life. And his interest in Oriental literature had been sparked by lectures on the subject he had heard as a student in wartime Berlin. He

> often told me that his professor of Orientalistik used to lecture about Eastern despotisms, while actually voicing a critique of the Nazi regime. He thought this exposed the difference between national socialist and communist totalitarianism. No such Aesopian lectures would have been possible to deliver at a university under Stalin; in the Soviet Union the space for intellectual independence was much more restricted.

In 2019, Rudnytsky's diaries, belatedly discovered, were published by CIUS and ran to over 2,000 pages though they contained little about his life in Edmonton. Thus, it became evident that most of his thoughts were laid out on paper in privacy and for posterity. I think it evident in hindsight that he considered Stalinism a greater evil than Nazism, at least in terms of the continuation of intellectual life. I learned from my PhD student, Ernest Gyidel, that Rudnytsky had never formally completed his thesis in Prague. Some registered students were awarded the PhD, regardless of level of progress, when the university was evacuated prior to the arrival of the Red Army. Rudnytsky's chief problem throughout his life was his failure to finish his many projects. Those that were completed were through the labors of his colleagues and students, particularly John-Paul Himka.

Thus, John-Paul worked painstakingly on a book entitled *Rethinking Ukrainian History*, published in 1981 by University of Alberta Press. It was a collection of essays on various aspects of Ukrainian history by leading scholars, edited by Rudnytsky and Himka, the work divided equally. As the book went through the editing process, under my direction, Rudnytsky wrote me that he should be cited as the editor, followed by "with the assistance of John-Paul Himka." Then he requested that the phrase be in smaller typeface than that of his own name. It might be perceived as petty, but I think he was only too aware of the paucity of his own publications, especially in the English language.

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RFE/RL

I arrived in Munich, (West) Germany, in autumn 1985 at the American radio station Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty – it was based there between 1949 and 1995. I started a job linked to the Ukrainian program under the nebulous title Research Analyst, in a section titled simply Program Support. There were two such positions in the Ukrainian section occupied by Roman, a New Yorker with a quick wit that belied a very dedicated scholar with a PhD from the University of Michigan who was not always in tune with the wishes of his superiors, and myself. Roman had been there for some eight years and his desk and Ukrainian newspapers occupied most of our very large office. He was also at that time a heavy smoker of Camel cigarettes so one of my first acquisitions was a large fan.

Having received a German work permit under EU auspices as a British citizen, I received a pass to enter the building and Lan and I were assigned an apartment in Balanstrasse, on the tenth floor of a new building opposite a supermarket. We knew little German but were soon enrolled in an intensive language program. Getting to work involved a simple tram or bus ride. We also managed to get some part-time help with a local babysitter who had two small children of her own. As in Edmonton, I felt very much an outsider, especially since I was once again obliged to rely on my British passport in order to get a work permit. I also had no idea what to expect from this multinational operation and its Cold War raison d'être.

RFE/RL was by any standards an unusual place. The center of activities was the canteen in the basement where would gather, at any time of day, people of all the nationalities of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, together with some German staff and British and American researchers and administrators. Alcohol was permitted at all times and beer could be purchased from a vending machine. There were certain unwritten rules: the Poles would not sit with the Russians, the Armenians and Azerbaijanis kept well apart, as did the Hungarians and Romanians. The heads at that time were George Bailey (RL) and George Urban (RFE), and the Board for International Broadcasting in

Washington, DC was the main authority.

The radios were a Cold War project that started in 1950–1951 under the auspices of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). In 1971, the CIA relinquished control though without doubt there were some agents still present. There were also KGB infiltrators, including, as I learned later, the head of the Russian Service, who redefected back to Moscow some years after I left. In Moscow, Konstantin Chernenko was the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, a decrepit figure but a clear reversion to the former days of Leonid Brezhnev. RL had a team working on the Kremlin whose articles appeared in the weekly research bulletin, supervised by a suave and very tall British economist called Keith Bush.

My focus at Program Support was contemporary Ukraine. Roman's area was the church and the national question, we both delved into Soviet politics, and that left me with the economy and energy issues. Every morning began with the daily "Budget," a collection of news items from around the world, with German and American predominating, and about two inches thick in multi-colored paper, copied from the original or typed out. I never did discover who put together these lists but everyone traipsed to their mailboxes and carried the bundle to their desks, after which – usually with a coffee – they began to sift through the Budget, putting aside items that seemed particularly valuable. It was impossible to read everything and one could have spent an entire day just reading these news items. But we were also permitted to order Soviet newspapers and magazines, which arrived quite promptly, with perhaps 2-3 days delay. Roman had ordered most of the Ukrainian ones already so I merely had to add a few that were more in the area on which I was working.

Program Support included research analysts working in non-Russian regions of the former Soviet Union – Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Transcaucasia, and Central Asia. The group contained some outstanding talents, including the future Estonian president, Toomas Ilves. Our boss was a quiet and kindly American, John Eriksen, who had been a professor at Bowling Green University in Ohio. Roman used to laugh at his struggle with new technology. When we had new computers installed, John would comment that we only needed to press a button and our papers would appear in the print room, like magic. It seemed to me at the outset that John did not like or approve of Keith Bush, because he (Bush) was the true arbiter of what RFE/RL readers would see in the weekly Bulletin, which was widely read in Washington, as well as by scholars at universities.

Studies of the Soviet leadership were written most regularly by Elizabeth

Teague, a very pleasant English woman, her compatriot, Ann Sheehy, who criticized everyone and everything and had an acid tongue (but whom Roman considered brilliant), and an outspoken Russian woman, a heavily made up native of Leningrad, who had reportedly been deported from the USSR for assaulting a policeman and was madly in love with Keith Bush. In the area of Foreign Policy was another person of Ukrainian heritage, Bohdan Nahaylo, who had moved to RFE/RL from Amnesty International and who also was a prominent writer for the London *Spectator*. Nahaylo and his Canadian wife Marusia had a son, Max, who was the same age as Carlton, while Roman and his New Zealand wife Alison's son Daniel was also born around the same time. Beyond work, therefore, our families naturally gravitated together. Bohdan later became head of the Ukrainian Broadcasting Service.

Was RFE/RL mainly a propaganda organ? There is no doubt that it exuded a Cold War mentality. Employees were advised not to cross the border of the Iron Curtain because their safety could not be guaranteed. Among the employees, especially the broadcasters, were many people who had fled from their homes in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and elsewhere. Broadcast briefs provided critical insights for Soviet and East European residents who were not expected to read or hear such news at home. The emphasis was on 'critical'. There was much interest in literary figures too and a debate had ensued while I was there about Solzhenitsyn and whether he was an anti-Semite.

One day there was a bomb scare. The whole building had to be rapidly evacuated and there were talks about KGB infiltration. It was not necessarily far-fetched since the Cold War reached new heights in the brief period between the demise of Brezhnev and what is often called the interregnum (Andropov, Chernenko leaderships) before Gorbachev took over. After several hours we were allowed back to our offices with the sheepish explanation that a bomb had indeed been found, but it was an unexploded British bomb from the Second World War, which had landed in the tennis court across the road. The incident reflects the atmosphere within RFE/RL in the mid-1980s.

During the early months I was there, one of the visitors to the radios was Edward Teller, the creator or co-creator of the Strategic Defense Initiative (Star Wars) program that threatened to end the Cold War equilibrium by placing a huge anti-missile shield over the United States. The program, enthusiastically embraced by the administration of Ronald Reagan, incensed the Soviet Union, but also Western Europe, which feared that it would be abandoned to a conventional attack by Warsaw Pact Forces while the United States moved into isolation. Teller was a bombastic and outspoken man but lectured very effectively – though in truth few of us listening could follow

everything he said. After his talk someone asked whether the scheme would actually work. Teller immediately asked the speaker what his nationality was.

"I am Romanian," was the response.

"Why should I speak to a Romanian?" Teller snapped. Many in the audience gasped with surprise. But there was no apology and Teller moved on to the next question.

The alcohol license did not survive my period at RFE/RL. The Ukrainian desk included a prominent but erratic Ukrainian poet called Moisei Fishbein, a big balding man in his late 30s, who would intervene suddenly amid the day's activities. I sensed his presence behind me one morning in the office.

"What are you reading?" He asked.

"*Izvestiya*."

"Why do you read such shit?" He pronounced it as "sheet."

"Well it's part of my job to read the central press," I responded.

"Shit!" He repeated. "It's all shit!"

Fishbein was drinking in the canteen late one day and decided to stub out his cigarette on someone's head while leaving. I never did learn the identity of his victim, but he did not respond quietly and the canteen was wrecked as others joined in the affray. Hard liquor was subsequently banned, though no such restrictions were ever put on beer and wine. One of the journalists from the Czechoslovak desk used to keep her glass of wine and bottle on the windowsill in the canteen, returning to it after each broadcast. She was visibly withering away because she never consumed any food, though reportedly she had a wonderful broadcasting voice.

I produced a number of research papers and eventually began a study of Ukraine's energy options, which generally signified what Moscow believed were in the best interests of Ukraine and how they were to be introduced. It soon became evident that nuclear power was – as I wrote in one of my first papers for RL – the "wave of the future." It was a simple matter to put together files on each topic, including Chernobyl, the first nuclear power station in the republic and the only one with reactors moderated by graphite. I was also

interested in the Donbas coal industry and sent several papers to the British publication, *Soviet Analyst*, which always welcomed them. Sometimes it was easier to publish in the *Analyst* than in the radios' research bulletin, which tended to focus on central politics.

In late 1984, my final changes to the PhD were approved and I attended the degree ceremony in Sheffield the following May, along with my parents. At that juncture, however, I had become more of an analyst than an academic. At RFE/RL we were obligated to write short pieces on relevant topics and sometimes at the demand of the broadcasting desk. The desk could then rework the piece for broadcast. Only very occasionally did I request to see transcripts of the broadcasts and sometimes did not recognize my original text. Still, Munich was a fascinating place to live, with its spacious parks, beer gardens, palaces, and museums. The Alps were a short car drive away and Salzburg two hours to the east. Weekends were often spent by a lake or in the mountains.

In January 1985, RFE/RL selected me as a candidate for the two-week long Salzburg Seminar, run by the Harvard School of International Studies and held at the Schloss Leopoldskron in a picturesque setting, perhaps best known for some of the scenes in the 1965 musical *The Sound of Music*. Our topic of discussion was European-American Relations with the Soviet Union. Along with myself, our delegates were Bill Murphy from RFE's Foreign Policy desk – a former CIA man – and Vladimir Socor who was a research analyst for the Romanian desk. Among those offering the lectures were Dimitri Simes, a young Mark Beissinger, Samuel Huntington, Arnold Horelick, and Alec Nove. The discussions were earnest and relevant and those selected to attend included mainly young diplomats from the US and Europe.

One evening in the magisterial and ornate dining room, I happened to sit at the same table as Huntington and Horelick, who began a furious argument on détente that lasted for about an hour. The former's tone was scholarly and detached, while the latter was bullish, aggressive and concerned with NATO responses to an attack through Europe by conventional Soviet forces. From what I recall, Horelick, the founding director of the RAND/UCLA Center for Soviet Studies, was criticizing Huntington's theory that NATO's response should be a diversionary attack into Eastern Europe from a different direction as a means to evade the overwhelming Soviet forces. The discussion preceded the publication of Huntington's most famous article, *The Clash of Civilizations*, published in *Foreign Affairs* in 1993.

I also spent some time with Nove, and selected his discussion group. I knew he was a long-time friend of Everett and had been born in Petrograd in 1918.

He was utterly charming, with large white sideburns, a balding pate, and an outrageously English accent, eloquent but almost comical in the correctness of his pronunciation. The American attendees included John Fox, a graduate of Princeton, and John Evans, who had opinions on virtually everything and was the closest thing to an American aristocrat I had ever encountered. Among his subsequent roles was that of US Ambassador to Armenia, a position from which he was suddenly dismissed in May 2006 after less than two years, ostensibly because of his expressed recognition of the 1915 Armenian Genocide. In general, in the Salzburg discussions, the Europeans were apprehensive of American approaches to the Cold War, since they were concerned about the Star Wars program.

In the spring there was much excitement at RL about the emergence of a new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, who seemed to represent a different style of leadership to the geriatric cronies who preceded him. RL carefully monitored his speeches in different cities and candid responses to questions. The attitude was one of acute suspicion, which appeared justified when some analysts began to freeze frames of Gorbachev in regions as different as Dnipropetrovsk in Ukraine and western Siberia, and discovered that the faces in the audience were the same in each case. The spontaneity was thus exposed as a fabrication. Glasnost and Perestroika were the two new watchwords, neither of which were completely new, but the self-criticism at least promised a thaw from the previous three leaderships of Chernenko, Andropov, and Brezhnev.

Visitors started to arrive at RFE/RL, mainly friends of Solchanyk. They included Roman Szporluk, his former PhD supervisor at the University of Michigan, Frank Sysyn, then based at Harvard's Ukrainian Research Institute, and Taras Kuzio, editor of *Soviet Nationalities Survey* and soon to be best known as the director of the CIA-financed Ukrainian Press Agency. Kuzio, who is of small stature, appeared with two sinister looking fellows either side of him, who had every appearance of being his bodyguards. Bohdan Krawchenko also arrived en route to Eastern Europe and stayed at our apartment for a couple of nights. One morning I found him taking books off my bookshelf and shoving them into a large bag. "It's okay," he reassured me, "they are all CIUS publications and I can replace them. But they are needed in Ukraine." In their different ways, both Kuzio and Krawchenko were committed to bringing change in Ukraine, which at that time seemed a remote possibility.

In the summer of 1985, RFE/RL sponsored a trip to the University of Illinois for both Solchanyk and myself to attend the Ukrainian Conference in Urbana-Champaign. Mace was there and by now had established himself as

something of a celebrity in Ukrainian community circles for his work on the Ukrainian Famine. Clearly, he was the guest of honor and had been appointed the Director of the US Commission on the Ukraine famine, which involved dozens of interviews with famine survivors now in the United States. The conference was organized by Stephan Horak, an historian, and Dmytro Shtohryn, a professor of Slavic languages, and supported by Bohdan Rubchak, a literary scholar.

Many of the papers were interesting though in terms of organization the conference left something to be desired. In 1985, it should be recalled, there was no possibility of attendance by scholars from Ukraine. We at RFE/FRL were probably the best informed about contemporary Ukraine. That is perhaps why it caused a ruckus when Rubchak asked Solchanyk and I to move tables at the banquet to make room for Mace, evidently the priority guest. Solchanyk informed Rubchak that likely he would not be showing up for his panel in the morning, and the two exchanged some heated words.

Mace, whom I had last met in Edmonton two years earlier, was an affable and very sociable man of 33 years, smoking constantly and usually with a glass of hard liquor close at hand. He was a storyteller and a gossip, and could be extremely funny. I was never certain how seriously he regarded his task of researching the famine. On one occasion he told me he had selected the tragedy as the best way of gaining prestige in the scholarly world, but he was also very interested in Ukrainian community politics and on first name terms with everyone of any significance. He would intersperse his conversation – usually a monologue – with phrases of Oklahoman Ukrainian in the thickest accent imaginable. Evidently his Ukrainian would get better.

Probably in 1985 he was at the peak of his powers, with his thesis published as a book, and heading an important United States Commission on the Ukraine Famine that had already been bitterly denounced by the Soviet authorities, who still maintained that no famine had occurred. Later, Mace would complain that he was ostracized for his views by the American scholarly establishment and forced to move to Ukraine to continue his career.

By the end of the year 1985 in Munich, I had compiled several files of information about Soviet nuclear stations in Ukraine. I had also decided to leave the radios and return to Canada. It was a difficult decision to make when the salary and benefits were unmatched virtually anywhere. At the same time, I always felt I was on the periphery of a war, in which I was more of an onlooker than a participant. My wife was also uncomfortable in Bavaria, where she felt, with some justice, that Asians were not regarded favorably. Moreover, we were expecting a second child and thought it might be

preferable for him/her to be born in Canada. Krawchenko had succeeded Lupul as Director of CIUS and had offered me a position as a Research Associate. RFE/RL, also, was a difficult place to work with the various animosities and intensive security.

4

Monitoring a Nuclear Disaster

The year 1986 was a momentous and tragic one for me. In March, our daughter Nicole was born, apparently healthy but within 24 hours she had some seizures, attributed later to deprivation of oxygen during her birth. Though my wife and I never followed this up – we were so traumatized by what had happened – it seems in retrospect that it was a result of the obstetrician's error rather than any innate problems or something linked to the parents. She suffered from cerebral palsy throughout her short life, but we kept her close, at home, with much help from friends, neighbors, and our parents.

Barely seven weeks later, Krawchenko came hurrying down the hallway at CIUS announcing a nuclear accident in Ukraine. He was well aware of my studies of nuclear power in Ukraine and anticipated I would be busy. Sure enough, within hours of his announcement, phone calls came to CIUS at ever-increasing frequency. A UPI report, later deemed fictitious, had estimated there were already 2,000 deaths, and we learned that the accident had occurred at Ukraine's first nuclear power station at Chernobyl (Chornobyl in Ukrainian). In North America in late April 1986, few people had even heard of Chernobyl. Therefore, I could at least provide some background information, though I could not keep up with events. The phone calls continued day after day.

On April 30, I received a call from the Prolog office in New York, a Ukrainian group run by Roman Kupchynsky – and also, as I later discovered – financed by the CIA. Kupchynsky was probably the major figure on the payroll from the Ukrainian community at the time. Its members intended to hold a press conference in New York the following day and wanted me to be there as a spokesperson. All expenses would be covered. The only way to get there was to take the overnight red-eye flight from Edmonton to Toronto, and then on to New York the following morning. The press conference would be in mid-afternoon. By this time, the USSR were reporting that two people had died, and that a 10-kilometer zone round the station was being evacuated,

including the town of Prypiat where the plant operators and their families lived.

Though not obvious at the time, this was to be the beginning of my peregrinations, which never really ended for the next decade or so. Thrust into the limelight by chance, it proved hard to extricate myself, and perhaps at heart I embraced it, full of rash confidence that was not really merited. Lan allowed me to continue, despite our home difficulties with Nicole and an older child still under five. Career-wise, it seemed like I could use and supplement my knowledge, and at CIUS both earlier and currently, I was fairly low in the hierarchy. Suddenly, I was the best-known person there; in turn, it became better known because of my activities. But there are prices to pay for such selfishness and ambition.

After the marathon journey, I was picked up in New York and driven to Prolog's headquarters where people were writing their statements for the press conference at the Ukrainian Institute of America near Central Park. The conference was packed and all the main US news outlets were present. They were dissatisfied with the statements because of their lack of details. At one point, a reporter yelled out:

"What do you think of the figure of two dead?"

Without thinking I responded: "The figure of two dead is lunacy."

That was apparently what they were hoping for. I was asked next to appear on CBS Evening News and interviewed by different newspapers, most notably New York *Newsday*. At the end of an exhausting day I was relaxing at Kupchynsky's home when the phone rang. A Ukrainian group in Montreal was requesting that I go there the next day for another press conference. Kupchynsky asked me if I was okay with that, and quickly arranged another flight.

Montreal seemed somewhat subdued by comparison but the Ukrainians there were out in force. After a panel on Chernobyl, I attended a solemn ceremony at the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which was for Easter, but now with the gloom of Chernobyl detracting from what is usually a joyful commemoration. It lasted for about four hours, but I did not remain to the end.

Once I returned to Edmonton, I resolved to write a book on nuclear power in Ukraine, with Chernobyl events added at the end. Krawchenko agreed to give me all the time I needed. He also negotiated a contract with colleagues he

knew at Macmillan in London. That company was extremely enthusiastic. There could hardly have been a hotter topic. I made the decision after listening to several 'Kremlinologists' on television discussing the situation, who clearly had very little knowledge of the Soviet nuclear power program.

I also applied to the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa for permission to visit Chernobyl, but did not receive any response at the time. Together with the notes I had and updates sent from Munich by Roman Solchanyk, I was able to complete the book *Chernobyl and Nuclear Power in the USSR* after three months of frantic writing. It was not a perfect book, but it at least provided a solid background. Tim Farmiloe, then director of Macmillan Press, acquired world rights and published the US edition through St. Martin's Press in New York, while CIUS Press had the Canadian rights. In the United States, I had a book launch in New York and the first edition quickly ran out of print, to be replaced by a second. In Canada, by contrast, sales were slow because CIUS Press lacked the publicity that the bigger companies could wield.

The broad exposure continued throughout the year. In late 1986, I was in Washington to give talks at the US Department of State, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and even The White House, which was arranged through an internal employee Kateryna Chumachenko, subsequently the wife of Ukraine's third president, Viktor Yushchenko. I also spoke to the local Ukrainian community in Washington, renewing my acquaintance with old friends such as Iaro(slav) Bihun, Jurij Dobczansky, and Ross and Martha Chomiak, among others. At the same time, the USSR revealed more and more information about the aftermath of the disaster. It was evident to me that I could not leave this subject for some time. The only question was how to approach it.

Early in the following year I received requests for talks by a number of Ukrainian student groups at US universities, including Michigan, Pennsylvania, Columbia, and Rutgers. These visits were usually combined with other events involving the local communities, dinners, church services, and ceremonies. I was writing regular articles for *The Ukrainian Weekly*, which published verbatim everything I wrote, with the strong encouragement of its editor Roma Hadzewycz, a small but dynamic woman with a great sense of humor and a strong commitment to the Ukrainian cause. If Chernobyl was the topic, then I was usually the first to be considered as a speaker. It was not really my 15 minutes of fame because it seemed never-ending. A debate had emerged concerning the effects of low-level radiation. Chernobyl was linked to the anti-nuclear movement and campaigns against nuclear reactors in US, Germany, Poland, and other countries.

In the fall, I gave a speech to the East-West Round Table, Foundation for International Affairs in New York, which published it in pamphlet form, followed by a Discussion section in the form of an interview in the *The East-West Papers* issue of September/October 1987 under the title "Beyond Chernobyl."

Later in 1987, the Ukrainian National Association (UNA) approached me about writing another book, which they promised to assist financially. Its leader, John Flis, had the title of Supreme President – in fact Roma, who had to deal with them frequently as they published her newspaper, always referred to them as 'The Supremes'. Flis was an amicable and courtly fellow, and agreed promptly to the suggested sum for supporting a new book. I used the funds to hire a biomedical engineering student from the University of Pennsylvania, Leda Hewka, who was fluent in Ukrainian and Russian, to come to Edmonton and work with me for several months on the second book. She was a brilliant assistant and we quickly worked through a vast amount of material.

My only real difficulty was understanding the nature of the reactor and how to write about the causes of the accident. I decided to consult with experts at Atomic Energy of Canada, and in particular its safety expert Victor G. Snell, whom I met in Mississauga, Ontario. Victor and other nuclear scientists, such as Heiki Tamm, had studied the accident's causes in depth, concerned because the CANDU (Canada Deuterium Uranium) reactors also used graphite as a moderator, as at Chernobyl. Victor agreed to write an introduction to my book, putting forward the explanation of how the accident had occurred in the view of Canadian nuclear experts. I also visited Atomic Energy of Canada Limited's (AECL) research station in Pinawa, Manitoba, and was taken to see the experimental nuclear waste disposal site under the Canadian Shield – it was subsequently abandoned.

The book appeared under the title *The Social Impact of the Chernobyl Disaster*, again with Macmillan and St. Martin's Press, in 1988. In my view it was more satisfying in every way than its rapidly written prequel. I was able to explain about the cleanup campaign, evacuees, Soviet media coverage, and reconstruction of life in the disaster zone. It was the featured review on the front page of *The Los Angeles Times Book Review* when it was published. The reviewer, James Oberg, described the book as "a shining example of the best type of non-Soviet analysis into topics that only recently were absolutely taboo in Moscow official circles."

Reviews of the book were universally very positive, with one exception. Reviewer Frederik Pohl, in the journal *New Scientist,* accused me of adopting

the Ukrainian mindset and of being too critical toward the USSR's recovery efforts. Likely he had made this conclusion from reading the Acknowledgements section where he would have found my thanks to the Ukrainian National Association. I have never been averse to useful criticism but this particular statement seemed unfair because manifestly the book was not pro-Ukrainian, I had done my utmost to be objective. In retrospect, such a comment might have been appropriate had it been made about my first book, which was written, partially, in anger. Rashly perhaps, since today I think it wisest never to respond to reviews, I decided to respond:

Rarely does an author feel obliged to respond to a review of his book, but when he is grossly misrepresented, as I am in Frederik Pohl's review of my book *The Social Impact of the Chernobyl Disaster* (Review, 7 January), he is obliged to speak out. First, I do not know what Pohl has got against Ukrainians, but clearly in his view it is tantamount to an offense to be associated closely with them. In doing so, one adopts something called a Ukrainian émigré "mindset," i.e. my views and those of the Diaspora coincide and I am incapable of independent thought.

In an interview with *The Ukrainian Weekly*'s Myrosia Stefaniuk, I rationalized my motives for writing the second book as follows:

> I ask myself, what do you do? You've got this information, and you see the obvious – the officials lying in public and getting praised, and getting away with it. To take one side or another is a dangerous thing to do, yet you are a human being and it is difficult and seems almost criminal, in a way, to try to stand aside from it.

But I had still not visited Chernobyl. In early 1989, I finally received a response from the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry through the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa to a letter I had sent two years earlier asking for permission to visit the accident site. It was finally granted and I could visit Chernobyl in the immediate future. Before describing it, I need to backtrack a couple of years to explain how I first entered the country I had studied for so long.

5

Entering the Soviet Union

I first entered the Soviet Union in 1987 with an unusual group of people. I traveled under the mantle of the World Media Association (WMA). This group had invited me to attend a conference in Seoul, Korea earlier in the same year with all expenses covered. Curious, I had accepted, and found myself amid some of the most extreme republican media writers in the United States, as well as very conservative Republican senators and congressmen. They launched into assault on what they termed the "liberal media," culminating in an appearance by their leader, the Reverend Sun Myung Moon On the final day, Moon ascended to the podium to a standing ovation, accompanied by athletic young men clad in black, who allegedly all had black belts in judo. Once there, he predicted that the next such forum would be in Moscow in five years' time, a statement applauded routinely but perhaps without much real belief in its accuracy. Oddly it turned out to be true.

In Seoul, I met Arnold Beichman, an editorial writer for the newspaper founded by Moon, *The Washington Times*. He held a research position at the Hoover Institution but spent his summers with his wife in Penticton, British Columbia. He was already 74 years of age and could perhaps be described as an old-school conservative intellectual who distrusted the Soviet Union wholeheartedly, and had written a book on Soviet violations of arms control agreements. Arnold would iterate choice phrases, such as "Capitalism is what people do when you leave them alone." Though I disagreed with him on most political issues, I found him an engaging and amusing companion. Quite why he associated with the WMA I did not know (other than its newspaper promptly published his weekly editorials), but evidently it was he who had passed on my name to them after reading my articles on Chernobyl.

After this meeting, I was invited to a "fact-finding trip" to the Soviet Union, something I found too good to resist despite my lack of political or religious affiliations to the group and general wariness of its political leanings. In short, I thought it might have been the only way for me to visit the Soviet Union, nicely concealed within a group of the political far-right. In retrospect, I do not

know whether it was a wise decision, but I accepted and flew in November to Helsinki, the only part of the trip that was not covered by the WMA. It appeared that they wanted some academic specialists on the USSR to accompany the journalists and group members – Beichman had also recommended John Dunlop, a Senior Research Fellow at the Hoover Institution, who became a good friend. We traveled by plane to Leningrad, and descended on Passport Control. Likely we were expected but the authorities seemed unprepared for the number of times the red warning light would turn on as we were filed through.

I had anticipated some problems because of my time at Radio Liberty, short though it was, but the long staring match I had with the border guard paled beside that of Ray Cline, the former CIA chief in China. By November 1987, however, a number of changes had occurred under Gorbachev, and after some delays we were all permitted to enter. Our assigned guide from Intourist was a 29-year old man called Igor, who spoke English without accent, and had a sardonic sense of humor. We would not be sent to the Gulag for speaking out, he said, so you are welcome to ask any questions. The other guide, Vladimir, was more senior and more obviously KGB.

We stayed at the Hotel Leningrad, alongside the water, with the cruiser Aurora nestling in the bay. Our arrival was relatively late at night and some of us decided to visit the bar, which was a place of mayhem. Numerous Finns were practically insensible with drink, some even to the extent of falling down and passing out. A group of Germans regarded them with benign contempt. We did not remain long.

The idea behind the fact-finding mission, and one of its appeals, especially at this point in Soviet history, was access to high-level officials (though not Gorbachev) and institutions, as well as major newspapers, and to ascertain the authenticity of the changes taking place. Such access would have been inconceivable for the individual scholar. And we were no ordinary group of tourists: we were mostly comprised of very outspoken right-wing Americans, a few Europeans (mainly Germans), and one lone Canadian, all ready and prepared to bring up controversial topics such as Afghanistan, the Mathias Rust incident (the young German who had flown a Cessna under Soviet radar and landed in Red Square), and of course Glasnost and its progress. Beichman typified the attitude when, entering a plush conference room at the Novosti Press Agency he observed an airbrushed picture of Gorbachev on the wall and bellowed: “Where’s his raspberry?”.

Most of the group were not merely suspicious of the changes in the Soviet leadership, they were downright hostile. If one had wished to rekindle the

Cold War, then this was probably the group to do so. But our hosts were unfailingly polite, no matter how rude (or ignorant) the questions might be – Bill Gertz, a reporter from *The Washington Times*, was particularly aggressive. At the office of the Mayor of Leningrad, one could ask direct questions about the Bolshevik Revolution. In Moscow, at *Izvestiya*, I was allowed to start a discussion about why the newspaper had not revealed more information about the Chernobyl disaster the previous year – the response was that it had received orders from the government not to do so – and even the touchy subject of the war in Afghanistan, then nearing its end, did not go unanswered.

One visit was to the ornate Orthodox seminary near the city of Zagorsk where clerics gathered to answer our questions. Their reticence irritated Vladimir, especially to the question:

“How many Orthodox believers are there in the USSR?” The clerics had hesitated.

“Tell them!” He demanded.

The priest then muttered “There are millions.” A simple answer to a simple question.

Igor was open to discussion. One evening I found him sitting alone at the hotel bar and joined him. We discussed the education system in the USSR and what he had read at school and beyond. He remarked that he had few problems wading through the works of Lenin.

“But Brezhnev was another matter,” he continued. “Can you imagine? We had to read nine volumes of his nonsense.”

I found Igor far more open and reasoned than many people in my own group.

After several days with the guides visiting the usual tourist spots, I decided to venture out alone into the streets of Moscow, enjoying the freedom. I visited the Old Arbat and was on the way back to the hotel when a car pulled up alongside and a man in full military uniform ordered me to get in. I refused but he continued to insist, with his passenger door open. Eventually, I just walked away and he could not follow without getting out of his car. I had no idea who he was or whether I had been watched all the way from the hotel. But he was alone. I could only imagine that if there were serious intent to follow and detain there would have been more than one person in the car. I learned later

that several members of the Glasnost informal group had been arrested that same day.

When we visited any museum, ballet, or opera, our group was always shepherded to the front of the line, while the red-faced freezing Muscovites in their hats and scarves waited patiently. Moscow's overall impression was that of a dark and grey city, with few lights on anywhere. We travelled everywhere in a comfortable bus and stayed at good hotels though we had to share rooms – there were no single rooms in 1987. I shared a room with a true fanatic who told me that he had helped foment uprisings to support military takeovers in Latin America against pro-Communist regimes. Our room phone would often ring several times during the night and go silent when we picked up. Virtually all the WMA men had Korean wives, whom they had not met before the wedding ceremony arranged by the Unification Church.

In between the two major cities we spent time in Samarkand, where two local KGB men followed us around without any pretense of concealment, and where an Uzbek journalist reported quite frankly about those who had "volunteered" from the republic for cleanup work at Chernobyl who had returned sick and many of whom had died, but were not on any official list of medical casualties. The city was outstandingly beautiful as were its people. Most importantly, the Soviet Union was now accessible to me for the first time. Thus, when the WMA invited me once again in 1988, with Kyiv (Kiev) now added to the usual Moscow-Leningrad segments, I decided to return. Roma Hadzewycz of *The Ukrainian Weekly* was also among the invitees, at my suggestion. Though Moscow was exciting and amid great changes, Ukraine was the place I really wanted to visit. It was November, very cold, and the flight to Kyiv on Aeroflot was hair raising.

Kyiv was notably slow to adopt to the "new thinking" proclaimed by Gorbachev. Whereas in Moscow and Leningrad informal groups proliferated, Ukraine lagged behind, governed by the Brezhnev-era party boss Volodymyr Shcherbytsky.[1] Though Chernobyl had inspired some new movements, their leaders often appealed directly to Gorbachev for support, struggling against their own party authorities, who operated from stronghold cities such as Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk. Our arrival coincided with the first popular protest in Ukraine, by an environmental organization, and attended by about 10,000 people.

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[1] Volodymyr Shcherbytsky (1918–1990) was born in Katerynoslav gubernia, then in the Ukrainian People's Republic (Dnipropetrovsk region). He led the Communist Party of Ukraine between 1972 and September 1989, when he also served as a member of the CC CPSU Politburo. He reportedly committed suicide on February 16, 1990.

Not long after we arrived in Kyiv, I was greeted at our hotel by Chrystia Freeland, currently Canada's Deputy Prime Minister but then a 19-year old exchange student from Harvard University. She was my neighbor in Edmonton, and very happy to see someone familiar. She remained with myself, Roma, and a few others, and we met with a well-known dissident and political prisoner Oles Shevchenko (b.1940), the new Chair of the Kyiv branch of the Ukrainian Helsinki Union. The interview, foolishly, was held in a hotel room, and was very frank. Shevchenko had served time in the notorious Perm labor camp and was later to be a deputy of the Ukrainian Parliament and leading member of the Ukrainian Republican Party.

After the interview we escorted Shevchenko to the hotel entrance where a fleet of "taxis" awaited him, all, according to him, KGB operated. Promptly, we retreated and called a regular taxi company. Roma and several others accompanied him back to his apartment. I learned from Chrystia, who remained behind, that she had attended the environmental protest and she provided me with the details, which we published as a joint article in the RFE/RL Research Bulletin. I had been recruited by S. Enders Wimbush, the new Director of Radio Liberty, on a two-year contract to write regular articles for the journal.

At Radio Kyiv, the conversation had begun in Russian, but Roma intervened and asked our hosts why they could not use their native language. They were happy to oblige, which instantly threw our hired translator into a quandary because he could no longer follow the conversation. Our Intourist guide was visibly annoyed. I also was able to meet with historian Leonid Leshchenko, who was on the editorial board of the *Ukrains'kyi Istorychnyj Zhurnal* (Ukrainian Historical Journal), with whom I had corresponded for some time.

In Moscow, we visited Spaso House, the residence of the US Ambassador Jack Matlock, who had gathered informal group leaders from across the Soviet Union. They included Taras Chornovil from Kyiv, and the brothers Bohdan and Mykhailo Horyn, from Lviv, with long records as dissident protesters. People from the Baltic States were prominent, as they had been at the Kyiv demonstration earlier, leading the way on the path to independence, though such a word was still premature in 1988. In Moscow there were meetings everywhere, as well as plays, theatre shows, public demonstrations, and endless discussions. Crowds would gather outside the publishing house of *Moscow News*, waiting for the latest edition to appear on the billboards. Gorbachev was still leading the way but at times being overtaken by more radical elements who wished to spread Glasnost much faster, including in de-Stalinizing the country.

During this trip, like previous ones, I always left with some anxiety about the state of health of my daughter, Nicole. Though her condition stabilized, it was never with the feeling of permanence because the seizures continued and were impossible to stop. Our pediatrician had recommended that we send her to some sort of remedial home, but that thought was never in my mind, nor that of Lan. At some point, I realized that she liked classical music and so would often play Mozart to her as I held her – she couldn't lift up her head – and she would give a rare smile. I believe to this day that she understood a lot more than we could discern.

We were living in a housing community called the "Ukrainian Hromada" in Edmonton, along with the Himkas, Freelands, Petryshyns, local author Myrna Kostash, and others. The Hromada's initiators were all women – Myrna, Halyna Freeland, Marusia Petryshyn, Chrystia Chomiak – and it had an ideological base to support feminism, Ukrainianism, and socialism. It occupied two streets in the district of Old Strathcona. We had joined after returning from Munich and after Nicole's birth had been assigned the largest house because of her special needs. Thus, during my travels, I at least knew that there were plenty of friends close at hand who could assist Lan if needed.

The day before we left the USSR I received a phone call from Lan to say that Nicole had died suddenly. Though she had never been well, it was still a terrible and devastating shock, and being in Moscow at the time I could not have returned any earlier. At her funeral in Edmonton, everyone from the Hromada attended, along with Bohdan Krawchenko and his wife Kim Fraser. It meant a lot to us and helped to assuage some of the terrible grief. I was and remain utterly grateful.

6

Chernobyl and Kyiv: 1989

Four months after I returned to Canada from Germany, the Chernobyl disaster occurred, though it was only after a couple of days that news began to filter through to the world. Krawchenko was not only encouraging; he released me from all other duties to follow the news reports from around the world. He recognized far more quickly than anyone else I knew the importance of the event.

Though little was known at the time, the accident was a result of an experiment on the safety equipment of Chernobyl's fourth reactor, one of four graphite-moderated reactors in operation at a large edifice on the Uzh and Prypiat rivers, about 80 miles north of Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital of 2.5 million people. The goal of the experiment, conducted by a senior engineer in the absence of the plant director and chief engineer (it was a holiday weekend), was to see how long spinning turbines could generate enough power during a shutdown before the safety equipment activated. In order to prevent an automatic shutdown, the various safety mechanisms were dismantled beforehand. One of the operators began to pull out control rods to raise the reactor's power, which caused a violent surge blowing off the roof over the core and causing a graphite fire.

Chernobyl was the only graphite-moderated station (the Russian acronym was RBMK) in Ukraine – there were others at Leningrad, Kursk, and a large station with 1500 MW reactors in Ignalina in Lithuania, as well as a new modern plant under construction near Smolensk. Much later the Kurchatov Institute of Atomic Energy acknowledged an inherent flaw (one of 32) in the RBMK reactor in that it became unstable if operated at low power. The Soviets boasted in 1985 that their nuclear program had remained accident-free, a statement that was later demonstrated to be a blatant lie – there had been a previous very serious accident at Chernobyl in September 1982 that was revealed when materials from the archives of the Ukrainian KGB were published in the 1990s.

On the ground around the station, events moved rapidly though dissemination of news was fragmentary. The graphite fire spread from the fourth to part of the third reactor. Firemen arrived from Kyiv to try to contain it, and first-aid workers attended to the early victims. All three categories suffered heavy casualties though the official total never rose from about 28 dead, and 2-3 instant deaths from the explosion. Helicopters flew over the fourth reactor dropping sand, boron, and lead pellets into the interior. The eventual weight derived pushed the reactor down toward the water table and coal miners from the Donbas and Russia were brought for the grueling task of constructing a concrete shelf to prevent its further fall.

The reactor was entombed eventually in what was termed a *sarkofag*, a concrete covering, prior to which a massive decontamination exercise began to remove the irradiated topsoil in the 30-kilometer zone and cut down the forested areas. Initially “volunteers” from all over the USSR took part in the operation, but within a month the authorities ordered military reservists to the zone for initial periods of one month that were soon extended. They had a few Geiger counters but the measurements soon went off the scale. The evacuation encompassed over 120,000 residents on both sides of the border. Eventually the figure would rise to 250,000 as levels for acceptable living standards were raised over time. Some residents refused to move; others, mainly elderly, returned without permission. The Soviet media featured disasters at US nuclear stations but eventually revealed more information.

The spring of 1989 was a pivotal moment in the history of the Chernobyl accident. At that time *Pravda* and other newspapers published the first detailed maps of the radioactive fallout based on Cesium-137 (and to some extent Strontium-90), extending well beyond the officially designated 30-kilometer zone around the reactor. The dark patches on the map extended almost to the Polish border in the west, over swathes of Belarus in the south, east, and central part of the republic, and over the Russian border into Bryansk and Orel. In some parts of Zhytomyr region of Ukraine there were hotspots of radiation that were higher than most parts of the 30-kilometer zone. In the wake of this information, which infuriated local activists and journalists, I finally arrived in Kyiv in May as the guest of the Foreign Ministry of Ukraine, the second Canadian allowed to tour the Chernobyl site after a professor of Physics from Manitoba.

In 1989 there were regular contacts between Soviet and Western academics. It was not unusual to find articles by or about familiar Ukrainianists in some of the Soviet press. What was unusual was for the Soviet authorities to allow a Westerner, such as myself, who had specialized on Ukraine and worked for Radio Liberty not merely to go to the Chernobyl station but to peruse at will

and photograph the premises of the Center for Radiation Medicine in Kyiv, even to go into rooms where sick firemen were still recuperating.

My scheduled arrival in Kyiv coincided with one of the most violent storms in the history of the region. I had flown from Toronto to Paris, and then to Moscow Sheremetyevo Airport. I was taken by an Intourist car to Vnukovo Airport and remained there in stupefying boredom for ten hours, without any explanations as to why the flight was delayed. Arriving in Boryspil Airport at 3:30 am the reasons for the delay became apparent. Winds reaching 90 kilometers per hour had felled trees in every direction. Power lines were down. Many roads were flooded. I later discovered that the storm had also affected the Chernihiv and Cherkasy regions.

After 31 hours of travel, the next day was a virtual write-off. It was supposed to have been the day that I went to Chernobyl but I had slept until noon. It was insufferably hot. I wandered down the Khreshchatyk watching the summer scenes and looking for drinks, drinks, and more drinks.

Through the Intourist office of the Dnipro Hotel the next day, I tried to reorganize my Chernobyl visit. After some time, I was informed that I was expected there, but that Tuesday (the next day) was inconvenient. Would Wednesday be appropriate? I replied that Wednesday would be fine. However, on the following morning, Valerii Ingulsky, the First Secretary of the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, arrived at the hotel at 8:30 am, and asked me what I wanted to do in Kyiv. “Who do you want to talk with?” he asked. “Make me a list.”

Needless to say, I happily complied. Looking it over, he noticed that the newspaper *Vechirnyi Kyiv* was included. He said that it might be possible to go there today. He then began to make phone calls, smoking constantly. In between calls, this rather portly man paced up and down the hotel foyer. But within an hour we were in a taxi heading for *Vechirnyi Kyiv*, a journey that necessitated driving across most of the city to some drab offices that also contained two other newspapers, *Prapor Komunizma* and *Kyivska Pravda*. We were greeted by Vitalii Karpenko, Editor-in-Chief, and Oleksandr Bilyk, Deputy Editor. Karpenko was a shambling figure in his 50s, while Bilyk was much younger.

I was interested in finding out what Karpenko was like, first because from the beginning of my visit, the great popularity of *Vechirnyi Kyiv* among Kyivans was evident, and second, because Solchanyk and I had just written an article about an incident during the election campaign that involved him and the

Chief Editor of *Robitnycha Hazeta*, Mykola Shybyk.[2] In general, my impression was that Karpenko by nature was not a reformer. However, as a political candidate and as one who wished to expand his newspaper, he had proved adept at changing with the times. Therefore, over the previous three years he had raised the circulation of the Ukrainian edition from 85,000 in 1986 to 130,000 in 1989, while the Russian edition remained stable at 330,000. In addition, he showed me a sheaf of files on the language question awaiting the attention of writer Ivan Dzyuba.

Karpenko was bitter about the election, less about losing the seat to Volodymyr Cherniak,[3] whom he seemed to respect, than the way his own campaign had been knocked off course by allegations of plagiarism. And yet he looked and sounded like a typical apparatchik. There was no enthusiasm to his ritualistic support for the conclusions of Gorbachev's 19th Party Conference, no energy in his admission that two-thirds of the mail reaching his newspaper was in support of the Ukrainian Popular Movement and only one-third opposed – which was a startling admission at that time. Before the interview the newspaper's photographer had taken some snaps of me, and an article about my visit appeared in the newspaper on June 14.

In the evening, I received a phone call from Yurii Shcherbak, the medical doctor who had been one of the first on site after the Chernobyl accident, who asked me over to his apartment, though it was already 10:30 pm. We had met in Edmonton the previous year. I made the two-kilometer walk down the Khreshchatyk and on to Chervonoarmiiska Street where he was awaiting me. After the formal introductions to his wife (who was Polish), son (adorned in a University of Alberta sweatshirt) and daughter, who curtsied, he informed me about events at the recent USSR Congress of People's Deputies and at the USSR Supreme Soviet, where he was obliged to sit with his enemy Shybyk, a rather unpopular figure, it seemed, in 1989.

We then watched a new video filmed in the Narodychi district of Zhytomyr region called *Zapredel* (Beyond the Limits). Following the path taken by an earlier film, *Mi-kro-fon!*, it showed deformed livestock and meetings in the

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[2] Mykola Shybyk (b. 1930) was a Communist Party member who worked first as a correspondent for the newspaper *Kyivska Pravda*. From December 1983 to September 1991, he was the editor of the republican newspaper, *Robitnycha Hazeta* (Workers' Gazette). He became a People's Deputy for the Congress of Deputies of the USSR, representing the Union of Journalists, from March 1989 to December 26, 1991, when the Congress was disbanded.

[3] Volodymyr Cherniak (b. 1941), is a Professor of Economics from Rivne region and one of the founders of the Ukrainian Popular Movement for Perestroika (Rukh). After serving in the Congress of Deputies, he was also elected to the Ukrainian Parliament in both 1998 and 2002.

village center of both residents and, on another occasion, medical personnel. The entire film was made on May 16, 1989, and represented another attempt to show the authorities that people in the district were sick, and that radiation levels there, three years after the accident, remained alarmingly high. Young children with hugely swollen thyroid glands and cataracts were depicted, and it was claimed that there were over 460 such cases. Although the film was taken to Moscow, it was not shown there. However, Italian correspondents had made twelve copies and taken them back to Italy where they caused a media sensation.

On the next morning, a wet and dull day, I was met at the hotel entrance at 8 am by Yurii Risovanny, a senior engineer from the Kombinat production association that had the task of directing the Chernobyl cleanup operation. He was 43 years of age, and I was taken aback by his excellent English, which was almost without accent. Shortly, a black Volga car arrived, and our driver took the road northward. Once in the countryside, the road quickly deteriorated. It was crammed with trucks, tractors, and other vehicles. At one point, the road was literally filled with cattle and our impatient driver went right into the ditch to circumnavigate them.

We drove at breakneck speed, while Yurii asked me, in his mild manner, why I had worked for Radio Liberty. Was it for ideological reasons? And if so, why, since I was not a Ukrainian? I replied, honestly, that I went there because I had wanted to conduct research. We approached Ivankiv. There was a sort of traffic circle – without an island – with signs pointing east to Zelenyi Mys (the new shift settlement for Chernobyl workers) and north to Chernobyl. Awaiting us was another black Volga with a blue police light on top. This was our escort into the 30-kilometer zone. I had no time to be impressed, since what seemed to be a reckless pace on the bumpy and gravely road to that point now became almost suicidal.

At Hornostaipil, the entrance to the 30-kilometer zone not far from the Kyiv Reservoir, our car was waved right through without pausing. I commented that Mikhail Gorbachev must have been accorded similar treatment during his visit the previous February. By now I had some slight doubts about the nature of my reception and my desire to get to the station was tempered by my apprehension both about the dangers of radiation and being treated as an unfriendly outsider. Already, very young reservists in brown overalls could be seen at the roadside. Some were sitting in the undergrowth smoking. Road signs carried radiation danger warnings. On our left appeared a truck station and also one for buses, with the clean non-zone buses on the left and dirty “zone” buses on the right.

The scenery was similar to that of Ontario, with forests that seemed to go on forever. Almost without warning we arrived at the town of Chernobyl at 10:15 am. Here people in brown overalls were walking around in large numbers. Yurii said that the city had a population of about 6,500 at that time, all shift workers. However, there was at least one old lady who looked like a local resident.

The headquarters of Kombinat were located close to the southern entrance to the city. It was a wooden building, a cross between an army barracks and residential housing. We met Pavel Pokutny, head of the Information and Foreign Relations Department of Kombinat. Pokutny was a big man of about 30, built like an American football player. He was friendly, but asked about Radio Liberty, adding that in 1985 it would have been impossible for someone who had worked there to visit the Soviet Union. He had evidently read my first book on Chernobyl, which, he said, was a great deal more accurate and realistic than most other accounts.

He then provided a brief account of the work of Kombinat, and over coffee and candies, I plied him with questions. We then discussed the details of my day in the zone, and I told him that it was satisfactory. He gave me a Geiger counter to carry around. Then Yurii and I got into an evil-smelling bus, obviously stinking from the overalls of cleanup workers, accompanied by the Kombinat photographer Sasha, and headed northward once again.

The countryside became bleaker. The first major viewpoint was of the incomplete cooling towers of the now abandoned fifth and sixth reactors, followed by the reactor buildings themselves. Number 5 was nearly completed whereas the sixth one was about 15% complete. Then the four main reactors came into view, much closer together than I had expected. The entire station was compressed into a small area crisscrossed with a maze of gridlines. Under the latter, the ground had been replaced with concrete slabs.

We drove to the main entrance of the power plant, at which inevitably there was a bust of Lenin, for whom it was named, and were taken up a marble staircase – by this time looking worn – above which were stained glass windows, and with what seemed like astonishing haste into the office of Mikhail Umanets, the station's director. At this moment, I felt a sense of unreality. After three years of studying Chernobyl, surely as one of the most critical observers of the situation, here I was sitting opposite a man who had been featured in my two books: one, moreover, who was the avowed enemy of the Ukrainian environmentalists and oppositionists such as Shcherbak, Dmytro Pavlychko, and Volodymyr Kolinko.

If it had not already been drummed into me, it was now more than ever apparent that all the stops had been pulled out for my visit. Umanets provided a frank interview (all my interviews were recorded) and answered the questions sincerely. One notable comment was the admission that he had been incorrect in advocating that the fifth and sixth reactors should be completed and brought online. They would have caused too much human suffering, he added.

After the interview, I presented Umanets with a University of Alberta crested spoon, and took a photograph of this stern, but seemingly vulnerable little man sitting at his desk. At the same time, it was – as I said to Yurii – as though he sat there in the face of reality, in spite of the horrors of the past three years. It was rather like a baron sitting in a besieged fortress in the Middle Ages, while knowing that his food supplies had run out, or would run out very shortly.

We donned white coats and overalls. Yurii, Sasha, and I were then taken by an engineer down an almost endless corridor that linked the four reactors of the station. We stopped at the control room of reactor No. 2, which was just in the process of a shutdown. The chief operator informed me that it was a scheduled 15-day maintenance shutdown. He said this in a monotone voice that was at odds with his lanky and bespectacled appearance and obvious interest in my visit.

Next, we went to the huge turbine hall for all four reactors, beyond which was located the sarcophagus covering of reactor No. 4. I was taking photographs at will, as was Sasha, although I thought by now he must have had thousands already. Then it was time for lunch. Umanets and the new chief engineer at the station, Yurii Solomentsev, also attended. We ate in a small room that was obviously set aside for the plant's leaders. I mention lunch because it was by far the best food I had ever tasted in the Soviet Union: a sumptuous feast of tomato salad, roast pork, borscht, and beef stroganoff, followed by delicious chocolates and coffee. Yurii Risovanny said that the workers' fare was less lavishly presented, but equally good.

That being said, we had to gulp down piping hot coffee in order to maintain our schedule. We stopped next at the sarcophagus, where work was continuing inside. I took photographs of this horrific structure while Yurii took out his Geiger counter. It jumped quickly to 1.6 millirems per hour, even though we were 400 meters away, Yurii informed me that closer to the structure, the level was around 10 millirems per hour, and higher within the building itself.[4] To put these figures into perspective, 10 millirems is about

[4] The US Nuclear Regulatory Commission limit for members of the public was less than 2 millirems per hour from external radiation sources.

1,000 times higher than normal background levels, while 1.6 millirems represents 160 times the background. In addition, our Geiger counter was being held at shoulder level. Had it been on the ground, then the figure would have been much higher. At the Chernobyl station itself, where men and women roamed freely without protection, the recorded level was 0.6 millirems/hour, 60 times the norm.

On the horizon now was Prypiat, the abandoned city for plant operatives and their families. Crossing the bridge into the city, Yurii told me casually, in one of those statements that suddenly explains a thousand questions, that on the day of the accident the radiation level on this bridge was 80 rems per hour – 800,000 times above background and potentially fatal within two to three hours. If this was the case, I asked, how could scientists such as Leonid Ilin, Vice-President of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, have stated that Prypiat need never have been evacuated? Yurii responded, unconvincingly, that radiation levels varied greatly in the city, so that Ilin may not have possessed the figure for the bridge. I got the impression that he himself did not really believe this explanation.

Prypiat was nightmarish. There is no way to describe adequately the impression that it made on me. Yurii said that two observers had remarked that it was like the effects of a neutron bomb, where the buildings remain but the people disappear. There was row upon row of deserted apartment buildings, a new soccer stadium (the first match was scheduled for May 1, 1986), and an eerily still Ferris wheel, The grass was now waist high and was blowing in the wind – the weather was quite pleasant outside Kyiv, in contrast to the wasteland created by the nuclear plant explosions. A swimming pool, which had four staffers, was operational and used by cleanup workers.

Originally, the city was noted for its greenery, but as the trees collected radioactive products, they were chopped down and taken away for burial. Instead, it looked as though a city of 50,000 had been built on a desolate wasteland. And yet, it would stand as a reminder of the supreme folly of the careless handling of nuclear power; of the willful subordination of nature to the demands of an all-pervasive economy. It would always remain empty, but its death has a cause. And many of its citizens had perished with it, or were dying a slow, surreal death in a different environment.

The Kompleks association was running an experimental hothouse in the city, which was to be our next stop. Some 20 people were working there, and residing in the shift settlement of Zelenyi Mys. Our host was a head biologist, Borys Solomanyk. He took us around to see beds of trees. One bed was planted after the nuclear disaster and displayed “normal” growth. The other

contained shoots that had received up to 600 rems of irradiation. This bed contained wild deformities of growth, with new elongated shoots growing out of the top of the tree. The irradiated trees were also warped in growth.

Our host pointed out the cucumbers and tomatoes and asked if I would like to try them. Ah, I surmised, the ultimate litmus test of courage. He duly washed a tomato and a cucumber. Before passing them to me, he took another cucumber and bit into it. I did the same, but pocketed the tomato to take back to Canada with me. Yurii remarked that I had a strange expression on my face. Incidentally, on the way home my suitcase went astray somewhere in Montreal and when it arrived two days later, the tomato had disintegrated among my clothing. Everything ended up somewhere in Edmonton's landfill site.

The conversation, not surprisingly, switched to radiophobia. I replied that it was not always a matter of radiophobia, that I had watched the film *Zapridel* and had read about the events in Narodychi. The son of the head of the hothouse had by then joined us, and he fiercely attacked the prognoses about Narodychi. He then insisted that I go to look at the Chernobyl area cattle that had been in the immediate fallout area, but had been relatively unaffected by the accident. Yurii commented wryly that he felt this was unnecessary as I had probably seen a cow before.

Observing my evident skepticism, the young fellow moderated his views. In Narodychi, he maintained, other factors such as content of the soil and crossbreeding of livestock had resulted in the deformities. However, the cattle at Chernobyl had been affected in other ways by the accident. Some had burns in their mouths, for example, but subsequently recovered. At that moment, a lively black dog emerged. I gave it a wide berth. The young man said that the dog was born after the accident and was not suffering from any diseases or deformities, but I drew the limits at taking the mouthful of cucumber. Not knowing where the dog had frolicked, I had no desire to pet it into the bargain.

We left Prypiat, the sad ghost town of the 20th century, condemned to eternal emptiness – other than as a tourist zone for day trips from Kyiv, I should add. As our coach approached the city's exit, we passed truckloads of irradiated cars being taken away for disposal. Sasha was quite excited by the sight, and I managed to take two photographs through the bus window. At the exit itself, a sign announced the distance to Kyiv: 158 kilometers. Driving past the plant, in the distance we could see part of the 25-kilometer long cooling pond, and the rail line to the newly built town of Slavutych, intended as a permanent location for plant workers, but later also abandoned.

We drove back to Chernobyl for an “inquest” about my visit, in the form of an interview recorded by Yurii. Such an interview, he explained, was designed to obtain the first reactions of an observer. I stated that nothing had been more revealing to me than the visit to the zone, especially in terms of appreciating the nature and the extent of cleanup work. And yet, as I had long felt, the Chernobyl plant should not be operating in 1989, both because of its ineradicable technical flaws and because it is irrational and unfair to ask people to work in areas with a high radiation background.

Even upon reflection, I could see no reason to change such a view. Had I never visited Chernobyl, I felt that I might have gone through life condemning the follies that took place around the disaster and also the technical drawbacks inherent in the Soviet RBMK reactor, but without holding very strong views on the pros and cons of nuclear energy. Having been to this distant northern borderland of Ukraine, my views had changed. My feeling then was as follows: while it may be true that every form of power production has its dangers, nothing is as irrevocable as the effects of a nuclear accident. In nuclear power, man had harnessed a monster. And humankind lacked the wisdom to anticipate the behavior of such a creature. I asked myself therefore whether we could manage without nuclear power, whether this would not be a regression to an earlier stage, a step backward. My conclusion was that we could exist only too well without this industry, which was destructive and endless in its capacity to lay waste to the natural environment.

7

Glasnost in Ukraine

My continuing research into Chernobyl was not over, because on the following morning, June 15, I had an interview with the staff of the Institute of Clinical Radiology at the Center for Radiation Medicine, affiliated with the Academy of Medical Sciences of the USSR. The Center was under the directorship of the Ukrainian Minister of Health, Anatolii Romanenko, and was concerned with the monitoring of Chernobyl victims. After the excitement of the previous day, it was very hard to readjust to dry analysis of the situation and what was likely to ensue for its victims. My emotions were mixed: I felt some anger at the irresponsibility of the authorities, gratitude that I had been allowed such open access to Chernobyl and Prypiat, and fatigue after the excitement and shock of the previous day. I had little time to gather myself and reflect on the experience.

The Center was located in the northernmost part of Kyiv. Valerii Ingulsky of the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and I were accompanied by another Yurii who was a translator with the Institute. He presented me with the newly released Russian-language book on the medical effects of Chernobyl, with contributions from Ilin, I. Likhtarev, and Romanenko, and from various Western specialists.

The Institute was a converted sanatorium, located in a pleasant, wooded area. We were greeted by three specialists under the lead of Oles Piatak, winner of a state prize, and a deputy director of the Institute. Both Likhtarev and B.G. Bebeshko, the most senior officials, were in Moscow, but Piatak was certainly a senior and well-known figure. The other specialists were I.P. Los, head of the Laboratory of Radio-Ecology, and V.V. Chumak, head of the Immunological Laboratory. Our meeting room was impressive, the table being decorated with cookies, cherries, and a choice of drinks. Piatak gave a description of the Center, noting the attention being paid to the welfare of the 209 patients who were subjected to very high levels of radiation from Chernobyl.

I sensed some apprehension as to the questions I might raise. After the discussions at Chernobyl, it would have been rash to assume they did not know my views. Piatak was particularly concerned to assure me of the openness of the results of the research, citing the book I had just been presented (although I had doubts about the openness of people like Romanenko and Ilin). We soon moved on to the topic of Narodychi, and I again mentioned *Zapredel* and an article in the district newspaper, *Zhovtnevi Zori*. They were well aware of the contents of both, but dismissed the idea that radiation was the chief cause of their problems.

For the first time I noticed a clear discrepancy between a statement and the apparent reality. Thus, it was pointed out that the Center had received records of the radiation level from the Narodychi district center only five days after the accident. Yet the civil defense chief in Narodychi had pointed out that the levels were recorded from the outset. How was this conceivable? Rather than respond to this question, the three doctors commented that if radiation levels on April 26, 1986, had been as reported, then today they would be ten times higher than officially recorded. What about hotspots, I asked? Hotspots could have fallen from the tires of trucks, it was acknowledged, but would not account for the lower levels today either.

We continued for about an hour. It was clear that there was a lack of middle ground between the staff at the Center and the bulk of Ukrainian writers and journalists investigating the issue. Over and over it was stressed – particularly by Los, the radiation specialist – that the critics were not experts, the intimation being that they should not be commenting in the scientific sphere. Thus, the Narodychi district authorities were described as well-meaning but essentially ignorant people when it came to radiation fallout. We discussed radiophobia and the psychological effects of the accident. Again, a very long and detailed response was provided.

The tour of the Center was more comprehensive than I had imagined would be possible. I was shown therapeutic rooms, a laboratory, showers, a meeting room, and then, to my astonishment, two of the patients were brusquely awakened so that I could talk to them. Both had been witnesses to the initial events at Chernobyl. One, named Ihor Symonenko, recalled the blast and his friends suffering radiation burns. He still had burn marks on his neck. The other was the well-known fireman, Vladimir A. Pryshchepa, clad in dark green pyjamas, who looked deathly pale, and announced that he was sick and unable to work. He had been one of the first on the scene but had somehow survived. I was asked if I wanted to question them, and even today I wonder if I should have requested a private interview. As it was, Piatak and a nurse were hovering by his bedside, along with Ingulsky and Yurii. Quite clearly, it

was difficult for him to say much. I told Pryshchepa about the monument to Chernobyl firemen erected in Edmonton, but he appeared disinterested. My impression was that he was simply too sick to care.

The patients brought home to me more than ever the horror of the event. I felt somewhat queasy as we walked through the grounds. I was shown individual trees planted by various renowned scientists. The names of Ilin and IAEA Director Hans Blix were included. Was there not something paradoxical about the fact that Blix, one of the world's major proponents of nuclear energy, should be planting trees in memory of its victims? I was also shown a monument to the Chernobyl victims erected on the grounds by Italians from Florence. At the end of the morning, we returned to the center of Kyiv in the Institute's ambulance.

After a short break, Ingulsky returned to the hotel. Evidently, his task for the week was to escort me around because he had even suggested lunch together. We walked down the Khreshchatyk to the offices of Radio Kyiv (it was called Kiev in 1989), and walked down a maze of corridors to a dingy meeting room, where Dmitrii Markov, Editor-in-Chief of the radio station, awaited us. There were some five staff members present. Although I received a warm welcome, I did not get the impression that Markov was anxious to respond to all my questions. On the Ukrainian Helsinki Union, for example, he said that the group was so insignificant that it would be a waste of time to discuss it. My queries were getting nowhere, so I asked the staff members what they would like to discuss.

One suggested a radio bridge between Radio Kyiv and CIUS, the costs to be shared. However, we did not get beyond the basics of such an idea. I was asked to explain the activities of CIUS and did so as thoroughly and carefully as possible. Finally, the International Service of Radio Kyiv conducted an interview with me, during which I brought up the Narodychi revelations, although whether the comments were actually aired in full, I never discovered.

Although the evening was ostensibly set aside for recreation, what transpired hardly fell into that category. We were now joined by Andrii Fialko, Third Secretary of the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a man in his 20s. Ingulsky, Fialko, and I took the metro to the stadium to watch Dynamo Kyiv play Zenit Leningrad. Along the way, Fialko began to take issue with some very specific points in my new book, *The Social Impact of the Chernobyl Disaster*. Had he been assigned the task of reading it before I arrived, I wondered? In any event, his opinion was favorable, but I was surprised how carefully he had read it. It had been much more than a casual glance through.

Back at the hotel, the three of us sat down to dinner. After a vodka toast, I was suddenly plied with questions in a most unsubtle manner, and from both sides. Such an interrogation was not altogether unexpected, but we had been in each other's company for so long that I thought the time may have passed. What did I know about the World Congress of Free Ukrainians, Petro (Peter) Savaryn, the Banderivtsi (followers of Stepan Bandera, the nationalist leader of the 1930s and 1940s in Western Ukraine)? I pleaded ignorance in all cases, although I admitted acquaintance with Savaryn's son Michael.

Andrii asked me, in his slow, quizzical manner:

"How did the Banderivtsi react to Glasnost?"

I was not in the habit of attending meetings of the Banderivtsi, I responded.

"But if you were, how do you think you would respond," he continued.

Well, I decided, if I had been complaining of the evils of Stalinism for 40 years, and then the Soviet media began to agree to everything I had been saying, I imagine that I would feel vindicated. Andrii stated that he had not considered such an angle.

The next morning, a Friday, Ingulsky and I took a taxi to the offices of the newspaper *Literaturna Ukraina*. Once there, we were greeted by Vitold Kyryliuk, Chief Editor of the section on international relations, a thin, balding, extremely alert man in his 50s. What looked like the entire staff of the newspaper attended the interview. I should add that at this time, *Literaturna Ukraina* was the most advanced newspaper in the Ukrainian SSR in terms of the progress of Glasnost. Kyryliuk began with Chernobyl, explaining that his newspaper had been the first to cover the Soviet nuclear industry in a critical manner. He cited the publication of the article by Lyubov Kovalevskaya about the problems of constructing the fifth Chernobyl reactor, which had been published in a prophetic manner one month before the explosion at the fourth reactor. His colleagues were very interested to hear where I had been in Kyiv. Upon hearing that I had visited the Center for Radiation Medicine, several people present assured me that I would be wise to discount everything I had been told there.

With Ingulsky bearing a pained expression, I was informed that *Literaturna Ukraina* had sent two reporters to the Narodychi district two days earlier, and that they had discovered radiation levels in the forests that were up to 80 times the natural background. (Their story was published as "The Truth About

Narodychi" on June 22, 1989). In a related story on the same day, an article in *Radianska Ukraina* by V. Skoropadska and Volodymyr Kolinko contained photographs of a Geiger counter showing levels at Narodychi of more than 200 times background.

The discussion at the newspaper ranged over a wide series of topics, including the children affected with alopecia (hair loss) in Chernivtsi in western Ukraine and ecological questions. The responses were lengthy and always detailed. Finally, I asked them whether they had ever pondered the fact that whereas anyone associated in any way with Hitler's regime was considered a potential war criminal in the West, in the Soviet Union, historians such as Roy Medvedev were continuing to insist that Stalin alone was responsible for all the crimes of the 1930s and 1940s. This made little sense to me, I added. Virtually everyone attending made a response.

Kyryliuk's was especially notable. He referred to a well-known criminal who had carried out heinous crimes in Ukraine but was living as a very old, free man in Moscow – Lazar Kaganovich. Our newspaper would like to bring Kaganovich to justice, he declared – among other things he was regarded as responsible for the famine in Ukraine in 1933. Then there were others, somewhat less clear-cut, like the case of former Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, the party leader in Ukraine from 1939 to 1949 and a protégé of Kaganovich. Khrushchev, in his view, was without doubt an accomplice of Stalin, but one who had realized and tried to rectify his mistakes. I noted this apparent reluctance to criticize Khrushchev at several meetings between 1987 and 1989, which I attributed to Gorbachev's sympathy for the former Soviet leader.

In my view, there would generally have been little difference between the views of the newspaper's staff and those of Western observers, but for one. They maintained that under Lenin, the USSR had followed the correct course, but that under Stalin many of Lenin's associates also followed a devious path. All the same, the statement that many of those persecuted by Stalin had themselves committed crimes held more than an element of truth.

I was very comfortable during this meeting, though Ingulsky, clearly, was less so. When we left the premises, he told me that it was easier to write articles, having talked with just a few people. The more people one talked to in Kyiv, he added, the more confused one became about the real situation. He warned me that many people did not adhere to the views of *Literaturna Ukraina*. I reminded Ingulsky of the story of the Israeli tourist who left Tel Aviv on Friday, arrived in Moscow on Saturday, and took a plane home Sunday, before writing a book entitled "The USSR: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow."

He grimaced – but later told the same story to Shcherbak so he must have appreciated it. Kyryliuk himself had said that he was pleased I had enjoyed my visit because "We don't often hear nice things said about us in Kyiv."

Shcherbak joined us for lunch, full of news about the impact of his article in the June 15 issue of *Literaturna Ukraina*, published the previous day, in which he had praised Ukrainian-language education in Canada and compared it favourably with the situation in Kyiv, and had also attacked the Ukrainian Prime Minister, Vitalii Masol,[5] for what he felt was a very poor speech at the Congress of People's Deputies.

Shcherbak and I talked about ecological issues. I mentioned that the World Congress of Free Ukrainians had established an Ecological Commission, and that I had been asked by George Kurys, a board member of the Congress from Toronto, to offer Shcherbak an honorary membership in this commission. Shcherbak felt that he could give no such commitment to an organization that was inherently political in nature. When I questioned this statement – something I would not feel inclined to do today – Fialko, who had joined our lunch table, said that the very name had a political connotation.

Shcherbak had become quite a celebrity in Kyiv. As we walked out of the hotel together, passers-by would come and greet him, or he would wave in acknowledgement as people shouted their good wishes to "Yurii Mykolaiovych." I told him to recall Andy Warhol's comment that everyone is famous for 15 minutes. "15 minutes? That's far too long!" was his response. I photographed him outside the Ukrainian government building, deliberately, I informed him, "so that Masol can take a pot shot at you through the window."

At the Union of Writers, our next stop, a meeting was in progress, but the mercurial Dmytro Pavlychko suddenly burst through the door of the meeting room, sat down opposite me at a table, and demanded questions. He answered them at length but in machine-gun style. Shcherbak sat alongside him. Pavlychko was most concerned to convey the impression that while the Shevchenko Ukrainian Language Society – of which he was one of the founders – had decided not to accept foreign memberships, close relations between the Society and created sister-organizations abroad should be established. Thus, in the United States a society was being officially founded in the fall of 1989, and he would attend the ceremony. Canadians should do the same, he snapped. Have the organization in Canada, keep the money

[5] Vitalii Masol (1928–2018) served two spells as Prime Minister: Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR, July 1987-October 1990 and Prime Minister of Ukraine, June 1994-March 1995. He received a Doctorate of Technology in 1971, and was a member of the Communist Party of Ukraine.

there – you can send us some if you need a tax break – and we can maintain relations.

There was some debate in the West at that time over whether foreign memberships had been curtailed by Pavlychko in order that the Society could be registered in Ukraine. I believe that there was much truth to that view. While Pavlychko made it plain that opposition to the Society was far less formidable than against the Popular Movement for Perestroika (Rukh), initially this was not the case. The previous February, he indicated, when Gorbachev spoke with him, the Soviet leader was concerned that Rukh and the Society might be the embryo of an alternative political party in Ukraine. Upon hearing the Society's goals, however, Gorbachev was prepared to add his endorsement. Yet the promotion of the Ukrainian language evidently had its price, which in this case was the dropping of the clause that allowed membership to foreign groups and individuals.

After this meeting, Shcherbak, Fialko, and I walked back to the Dnipro Hotel. Shcherbak had about an hour before he was due to face the Kyiv citizens at a public meeting to discuss the performance of the Kyiv-based deputies at the Moscow Congress, which was being held at the Dnipro House of Culture. As we approached the building, anxious organizers approached Shcherbak, relieved that he had appeared. Although the auditorium was crammed to capacity, the front table, which was reserved for the deputies, was empty. I thought that Shcherbak might be the only deputy to show up, but eventually Valerii Hryshchuk[6] walked to the podium.

Fialko and I took up a position to the right of the auditorium. There were no seats left, and even the aisles were occupied with people sitting alongside the seats. Most of the audience, clearly, was thoroughly dissatisfied with the performance of the Ukrainian deputies in Moscow. In fact, as one man shouted, there had been no Ukrainian presence in Moscow. The question was why. Hryshchuk's response was that he had not been given the chance to go to the podium to make his speech. In the first place, his "slip of paper" containing his request to speak had been misplaced and thus others who had applied after him were permitted to speak while he waited.

At this point, someone interrupted him loudly, asking him if he had forgotten his native language. Hryshchuk's reply was that his Ukrainian was somewhat faltering and would result in some delays in response. The excuse failed manifestly to satisfy the crowd, particularly as by profession Hryshchuk was a professor at the University of Kyiv.

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[6] Valerii Hryshchuk (b. 1952) is a physicist from Zhytomyr region who served as a People's Deputy of the USSR between 1989 and 1991. In 2012, he was a candidate for the Ukrainian Parliament from the Kyiv district but failed to get elected.

Shcherbak fared somewhat better at first, because his speech, while not given in Moscow, had been published in *Literaturna Ukraina*. His attack on Masol was very well received, but the audience wanted much more. Some wondered why the poet and deputy Borys Oliynyk [7] had chosen to visit Cherkasy rather than attend the Kyiv meeting. Many had denounced the Ukrainian deputy, Valentyna Shevchenko,[8] while others spoke contemptuously about Ukrainian Communist Party leader Volodymyr Shcherbytsky and how he had sat with other party members of the Politburo, disdainfully surveying the Congress from a distance.

Why hadn't Ukrainians supported Andrei Sakharov[9] and Yuriy Vlasov,[10] people asked? Why were there no calls for Ukraine's economic sovereignty, what about the Ukrainian Rukh? How could the Baltic presence have been so powerful and that of Ukrainians so negligible? Before long, there was some activity in our area. A banner was unfurled and eventually nailed to the wall. It demanded radical changes to the electoral law to remove all party control over the elections. Implicitly, it was a call for pluralism. A small, bespectacled man, who looked remarkably like one of the early Bolsheviks, had the contents of the banner handwritten on index cards, which he would distribute periodically amongst the audience.

As the accepted means of raising questions to the speakers was to hand a slip of paper to someone seated ahead so that it would eventually be passed forward to the front of the hall, many initially ignored this man, but shortly people began to retain the cards and to read them. Doubtless most people present would have agreed with the sentiments. One uniformed man was grinning widely at the message on the banner. Fialko made no comment.

I retained contact with Yurii Shcherbak in future years but lost contact with

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[7] Borys Oliynyk (1935–2017), born in Kharkiv region, was a Communist deputy in the USSR Supreme Soviet from 1989 to 1991, and a deputy in the Ukrainian Parliament from 1992 to 2006. He was also a member of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences from 1987 to 2017 as a prominent poet and writer, and winner of many awards.

[8] Valentyna Shevchenko (b. 1935) is a native of the city of Krivyi Rih who was elected Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR in March 1985 and served until June 1990.

[9] Andrei Sakharov (1921–1989) was a Russian nuclear physicist famous for his role in the development of thermal nuclear weapons. He later became a prominent human rights advocate and dissident and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1975. Gorbachev brought him out of internal exile and he was elected to the USSR Congress of Deputies in March 1989 as a member of the Democratic Opposition.

[10] Yuriy Vlasov (b. 1935) is an Olympic gold-medal winning weightlifter and writer, also elected to the Congress of 1989 when he broke with the Communist Party. He also ran for president of Russia in the elections of 1996, but received only 0.2% of the vote.

Fialko. I learned that he later became Foreign Policy Advisor to then Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych in 2006, and attained the rank of Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Ukraine but died on March 17, 2013 at the age of 49. Oddly, Ingulsky also died in the same year, January 21, 2013, at the age of 67. Both missed the dramatic events that would follow. Ingulsky's main legacy was his initiation of the Press Center and Office of Information of the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the early 1990s.

I invited Yurii Risovanny to my home in Edmonton the following year and conducted a formal interview with him during the latter part of his stay. He confirmed that to his knowledge about 5,000 people had died at Chernobyl during his time there. I published the interview in *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, and the citation of the number of mortalities was picked up by *The New York Times*, contrasting with much lower figures offered by UN agencies such as the International Atomic Energy Agency and World Health Organization. Few would doubt their accuracy today.

The same rift became further evident in 1990 at a conference in Kyiv sponsored by the 'Green World' environmental association (later the Green Party), led by Shcherbak and others. One of the few offers of Western aid to Chernobyl accepted by the Soviet authorities was that of businessman Armand Hammer, who had developed personal friendships with all Soviet leaders from Lenin onward. Hammer's designate was Dr. Robert Peter Gale, a 40-year old bone marrow transplant specialist and Associate Professor from the UCLA School of Medicine. Gale had conducted several transplants after the accident though ultimately all the patients died. He became a prominent voice, meeting with Gorbachev. In 1990, he was invited to speak at the Kyiv conference held by Green World, which I also attended.

Gale had cut an unusual figure in 1990s Kyiv, wearing clogs and sockless. As he walked down the aisle to deliver his speech, the clogs made a considerable noise, causing people to turn around. His speech focused on the bad habits of Ukrainians, particularly smoking, which he declared was far more dangerous to them than anything linked to excess levels of radiation. His speech was marked by a chorus of booing and thereafter he became identified among Ukrainian environmentalists with the "scientific establishment," someone who tried to water down the health effects of Chernobyl in line with the two UN agencies, the World Health Organization and the IAEA. In fairness, he was consistent. Over two decades later, when speaking about the effects of Fukushima at a meeting organized in Washington, DC, by the Health Physics Society, he declared that the risk of contracting cancer for the general public had increased by 0.002%.

The year 1989 is best known for the collapse of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, starting with East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, and followed by Bulgaria and Romania. Only in the latter country was there any violence, with the removal of Nicolae Ceaușescu, who had been in power since 1965. The psychological turning point was the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, in place since 1961 to prevent East Germans from defecting to the West. Gorbachev carries a lot of responsibility for the end of the Cold War, which is usually regarded as taking place by the end of 1989. In particular, his refusal to use force to keep the old regimes in place, in contrast to his predecessors Khrushchev (1956 in Hungary) and Brezhnev (1968 in Czechoslovakia). Glasnost, in short, extended beyond the Soviet Union to regimes that were far less secure than the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

In both Ukraine and Belarus, the changes came slowly, mainly because of the entrenchment of the Communist parties of these two republics. In Belarus, national consciousness was quite low, the population was mainly Russian-speaking, and the main inducements for change were economic conditions rather than political grievances. The economic decline of the Soviet Union was reflected with particular adversity in the republic because its industries were tied to other republics, mainly focusing on machine building, automobiles, and fertilizer products. Thus, when changes came here, it seemed initially that little had happened other than the disappearance of central control. Suddenly, political leaders had to consider issues like borders, banking, security, foreign policy, and – not least – future relations with Russia. But I am moving ahead of myself.

Linked to these tumultuous events, in October 1989, I was invited to a meeting of the CSCE in Sofia, Bulgaria, which would focus on environmental issues. My studies of Chernobyl had evidently been noted by some government people and I was invited to join the Canadian delegation at the meeting, which was attended by the highest Bulgarian leaders. Todor Zhivkov had been the First Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party since 1954 – he took the appellation General Secretary in 1981 as well as the title of President, adopted a few years earlier. His regime had made headlines because of its new policy to assimilate Turks, forcing them to change their names. Protests against this policy were at their peak at the time of our arrival, In May, Zhivkov ordered the removal of Turks and Muslims to Turkey, leading to riots.

At the conference was a group called EcoGlasnost, an informal association of environmental activists. Bulgaria was well known as the East European power most dependent on nuclear power plants. Evidently, they were invited by the

Foreign Minister, Petra Mladenov, but initially not allowed into the meeting hall. The opening ceremony was formal and Communist style, and I watched it from the balcony. I and several other guests were watched in turn by several men, who could only have been from the intelligence services. One approached afterward and told me he had been asked to give me a tourist visit around Sofia. He spoke in English and was courteous, if predictable. He even showed me an impressive Orthodox Church, but insisted that very few people ever attended services, other than the elderly.

Much of the conference focused on the treatment of ethnic Turks. The Americans had brought a large delegation while ours was formally led by the Canadian Ambassador to Hungary, Derek Fraser. When it was time for Turkey to speak the tension was palpable, but its delegate spoke in flawless English to the anger of the Bulgarians. About halfway through the proceedings we learned that security forces had attacked and beaten the EcoGlasnost members outside the hall. Some were taken to a forest and forced to walk back to Sofia. Subsequently, there were more anti-Bulgarian speeches, and Zhivkov and company appeared powerless to stop them. The Americans invited EcoGlasnost to join their delegation.

Fraser made a very impressive speech, in French, in support of the rights of ethnic Turks. Canada's role was important because the Americans had been expected to take such a route; Canada might have adopted a role as mediator. I was very pleased at the forthright nature of Fraser's comments, which pulled no punches. His and others' from the UK and France were humiliating for one of the Warsaw Pact's last hard line leaders; one, it appeared, who had no support from Gorbachev, who regarded him as a relic in the same category as the leaders of East Germany, which was now on the verge of collapse on its 40th anniversary.

Shortly after my return home, I learned that the Zhivkov regime had fallen, as a result of an internal revolt. Zhivkov was later arrested on charges of embezzlement and for his human rights violations, though he only served a short sentence under house arrest. Despite all my visits to the Soviet Union therefore, my most vivid recollection of the end of the Cold War was in Sofia, an ornate city surrounded by hills, and because of a policy that would darken the Balkans region in the near future – "ethnic cleansing" – this time for Turks because of their Muslim background and refusal to adhere to assimilation with the Bulgarian majority. In future years, Derek, who became Ambassador to Ukraine before he retired, always brought up the comment in conversations with myself and others afterward at dinner:

"David and I brought down the Bulgarian government."

The Cold War was ending in Eastern Europe. Could the Soviet Union be far behind?

The end of the year also brought wonderful news. Lan gave birth to our second son, Keelan, almost exactly a year after the death of Nicole. Thankfully, he was completely healthy, though born six weeks prematurely. His birth seemed to herald the beginning of a new age, bringing hope and the prospect that the system crystallized by Stalin was beginning to change. And for me, it was a minor miracle. Our family doctor had encouraged us to have another child and there were no reasons the new infant should not be healthy.

8

Career Moves

By 1989, I had started to teach some courses for the Department of History at the University of Alberta. As noted earlier, one of the Russian area specialists was Kenneth C. Taylor, who taught popular courses on Soviet military history. The others were Himka, who was appointed to the position formerly occupied by Rudnytsky in 1985, and offered courses on Ukraine, and Martin Katz, who taught Imperial Russia and specialized in Russian political thought of the 19th century. An opening there seemed unlikely, but I enjoyed the teaching and the break from editing.

In 1990, Katz slipped on some ice near his home and evidently announced that he needed prolonged hospitalization. The chair of the department, David J. Hall, asked in some desperation if it was possible for me to assist, so I took over a very full class on Imperial Russia at the start of the term with no prior preparation. I decided not to panic and to write new lectures for each week. The class, in turn, was appreciative, and we had some amusing exchanges about the situation. Hall was very grateful. I began to think that a more permanent career as a professor might be possible. I had not considered, however, that my own university might be feasible and applied for a position at the University of Ottawa.

It was at virtually the same time that a position opened up at Alberta thanks to the sudden and enforced decision of Ken Taylor to take extended disability leave. I talked with Philip Lawson, a friend in the department who worked on British imperial history, and he advised me to apply at once. I had published two books and a third, entitled *Ukraine Under Perestroika* was in press with Macmillan. That gave me an unusual advantage over most applicants. Ironically, the years working as a research analyst in Germany paid dividends in the Canadian academic climate.

The University of Ottawa was bilingual. I was short-listed and informed that I would need to offer lectures in both French and English. Audience questions could be in both languages on both occasions. I had high school French (or in

England, 'O' level French) and could read the language. In the month or so before the interview I worked assiduously with a tutor I had hired on a daily basis to brush up my conversation. Every morning, for three hours, we would go over basic phrases and discuss events. He also read through my proposed talk at Ottawa, which was on my thesis topic "La collectivization de la terre sous Staline."

In Edmonton, I gave a lecture to the department and was interviewed formally for the position. In Ottawa, I was hosted by Michael Behiels, a friendly and approachable man whose research was in the Canadian history, who gave me great encouragement. The talks went well, though the French one ran into one snag, which was that when I mentioned Machine-Tractor Stations and abbreviated them as MTS, some students were convulsed with laughter. Was my pronunciation so bad, I wondered? The equivalent acronym in French, a professor informed me afterward, signified "mutually transmittable diseases." I liked the location of University of Ottawa, with its central position and at the heart of the Canadian government district. My main concern was grading French-language papers written by Francophone students, which I felt would need to be content-focused rather than stylistic, whereas in English I could grade based on both.

In short, I was offered both positions, but there were qualifications. Ottawa, first, offered me a tenure-track position at the level of Assistant Professor. Hall's letter, which was strategic, was for a position at the level of Associate Professor, but with a deadline of only two days to respond. In short, I had to make a quick decision. Alberta, given my domestic circumstances, was the logical choice. Also, I would not need to go through the tenure process or be concerned about preparing courses in French. It was not an easy choice, however, because the thought of living in the nation's capital had intrigued me.

Once I had chosen Alberta, my life seemed to have acquired some stability. The world, however, was less stable. It was the summer of 1991. One month after I started my new career, there was a putsch in Moscow and Gorbachev was under house arrest in Crimea. The media descended. What was going to happen? I made what in retrospect was an inadvisable comment and responded (on August 19) that the putsch "was bound to fail" because it lacked all the ingredients of success, such as popular support, detention of populist leaders such as Boris Yeltsin, and a failure to monopolize the media. Most of us were watching events on CNN, for example. Radio Liberty was broadcasting Yeltsin's speeches back to the Soviet Union. My interview was published on August 20 in the local newspaper, and the next day, the leaders of the ruling group were on the run or dead. A shaken Gorbachev was flown

back to Moscow, his wife Raisa now white haired from the shock of the detention.

I also wrote an editorial, published in the *Edmonton Journal* on August 21, 1991, which was assigned the title "Kremlin Coup Sure to Fail." I began as follows:

> …the forces that removed Gorbachev, specifically the KGB, the military, and the police, evidently did not foresee the consequences of their actions. While Gorbachev was detained before boarding a plane to Moscow on Aug. 19, Boris Yeltsin, the popular Russian president, was left free on the day of the coup, and has acted as a magnet for opposition forces. By calling for Gorbachev's return rather than trying to take control himself, Yeltsin has also accrued wide support internationally for his bold and uncompromising resistance.

Thus, Gorbachev survived, though not for long.

I had attended another conference in Kyiv in the summer, organized by the Green World association – later the Green Party – which was led by Shcherbak. The big fear among locals was that with all the dramatic changes taking place, Russian forces would invade Ukraine. There were even rumors that tanks were massing on the border. It was a time for speculation. Many Canadians I knew were very active in Kyiv, including Marta Dyczok, and Chrystia Freeland, as well as *The Ukrainian Weekly* reporter, Marta Kolomayets. Bohdan Krawchenko was also a frequent visitor. I am not sure, however, that any of them predicted the collapse of the Soviet Union by the end of the year. In this same summer, the US president George H.W. Bush had warned Ukrainians of the dangers of "suicidal nationalism" and the support of the United States, manifestly, was for embattled Soviet president Gorbachev rather than Yeltsin or the leaders of the national republics.

In November, I attended the conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies in Miami. At the banquet, the keynote speaker was Jerry Hough of Duke University, a well-known commentator on Soviet events. He informed the audience that Gorbachev, appearances aside, was quite secure. He was playing Yeltsin like a puppet. As for the possibility of republics such as Ukraine becoming independent, the very idea was nonsense. Ukraine, in such a scenario, would become another Yugoslavia and be embroiled in a bloody civil war should it leave the Soviet Union. The viewpoint was not untypical among American political scientists and helps to explain why so few people anticipated the collapse of Gorbachev's

government. The most obvious and easily detectable fact – that he was very unpopular at home – was similar to the situation of Ukrainian leader Petro Poroshenko in 2019 – i.e. it was possible to be immensely popular abroad and detested at home. I would posit though that Gorbachev's demise was obvious to any of us who had studied the nationalities question and his feeble attempt to deal with it at the party conference of 1988, and subsequently in his attempts to revise the Union Agreement over the course of 1991.

During this traumatic political time, I returned belatedly to the notion of publishing my PhD thesis in some form. I decided the best option was as a collection of papers on the thesis and related topics. It was not evident in late 1991 that Soviet archives would soon be open and I felt that the thesis could in any case make a contribution to knowledge. I titled the new book *Stalinism in Ukraine in the 1940s*. It was a major departure from my earlier publications, which all focused on contemporary Ukraine, with Chernobyl as the subject of the first two, and a composite part of the third. It also seemed to me that the new monograph was more appropriate given my new career. It was published in 1992, once again with Macmillan Press in the UK and St. Martin's Press in New York.

I kept in contact with CIUS, which for some time permitted me the use of an office even though I was now spending most of my time in History, located across campus in the Henry Marshall Tory Building. There were changes there too. Krawchenko was clearly restless and anxious to spend more time in Ukraine. In 1991, he ended his tenure as Director. He had in mind the American scholar Frank Sysyn as his logical successor, but although the latter was keen to work for CIUS, he did not want to live in Edmonton. He suggested, in turn, the appointment of another American historian of 18th century Ukraine who had been working at the Library of Congress, Zenon Kohut. Sysyn would serve as Associate Director and be based at the CIUS office in Toronto. Once the arrangement was in place, the status quo was retained for a remarkably long time, until Kohut retired in 2012.

CIUS benefited from some exceptionally generous endowments, partly gathered as a result of the endeavors of Krawchenko, including $1 million from Toronto businessman Petro Jacyk, subsequently doubled by the oil-rich Alberta provincial government, for a historical project to translate the works of Ukrainian historian Mykhailo Hrushevsky into English. Krawchenko told me that the project would take about five years, after which the funds could be used to develop studies in any field of Ukrainian history. In reality, it has lasted over 28 years. From 1992, I switched my attention to Belarus, initially to study questions related to Chernobyl. Compared to Ukraine, it was receiving very little international attention.

At the university, I was fortunate to advance quickly to the rank of full professor, largely thanks to my four books that had appeared by the time I applied. Since my teaching had received favorable reviews, the promotion was painless, and took effect from the summer of 1995. By then I had a growing number of graduate students, especially at the Master's level.

Among the invitations I accepted during this period was one from the Ditchley Foundation, held at Ditchley House near Oxford. It was held in January 1994 and the topic was "Russia's Search for a Post-Communist Identity." The guests included Grigory Yavlinsky, the leader of the Yabloko political party in Russia, along with a host of British aristocratic diplomats, including Sir Rodrick Braithwaite, former British Ambassador to Moscow, along with the current ambassador, Sir Roderick Lyne. It was an international gathering based on Chatham House rules, meaning that nothing said in the room left it. Thus, I shall not break that tradition here.

There was one incident worth recalling, however. One morning, I took a walk outside the majestic hall into the grounds, with lush green fields stretching endlessly to the horizon. I almost felt homesick. Striding toward me was Ambassador Lyne. Hardly pausing for conversation, he admonished me, finger waving: "Just think young man, if your people hadn't rebelled 200 years ago, all this would be yours." I tried to respond but was so taken aback by the comment that I was lost for words. Mistaking me for a Canadian would have been possible given that I was a delegate from Canada. Mistaking me for an American was unfathomable. And if I had been American, how would I have responded? "Well we didn't like your tea very much"?

9

Belarusian Tales

Children of Chernobyl Congresses

I gave many talks on Chernobyl, particularly to government agencies. It was on the fifth anniversary, in April 1991, that I found myself in Washington, DC. If I recall correctly, I had been part of a gathering of anti-nuclear activists headed by Helen Caldicott, as well as a talk at the Institute of Strategic Studies at Georgetown University and a hearing at the US House of Representatives. On that same visit, I was invited to a meeting that included the Belarusian gymnast Olga Korbut. There I met a man called Yourie (his own rendering of his Christian name) Pankratz, who instantly regaled me, quite rightly, for focusing solely on Ukraine in my work on Chernobyl. The fallout in Belarus had been very severe. He invited me to a conference (it was termed a Congress) in Minsk the following April, at which, he said, I would be invited to speak.

Thus, I flew to Minsk for the first time in the spring of 1992. The city seemed spartan and Stalinist, with very wide streets and little traffic. A very large Lenin statue glowered from the central square, which had recently been renamed from Lenin Square to Independence Square. Its metro station still bore the former name. A journal from Lithuania had termed Belarus a “Soviet theme park” and in 1992 it was a fair appellation. The city of Minsk had seen a major protest in 1990, and the popular movement here began in the late 1980s but was smaller in scale than its counterpart in Ukraine, and its founding Congress was held in Vilnius since its initiators could not get permission for it to be held in Minsk.

It was a unique period in the history of Belarus. The Soviet period had ended but there was a power struggle between the Prime Minister Viacheslau Kebich,[11] who supported a military-security union with Russia, and the

[11] Viacheslau Kebich (b. 1936) was born in Volozhyn region of Poland (now Belarus) and was Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus, 1990–1994. He was a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1962 to 1991.

Chairman of the parliament Stanislau Shushkevich,[12] a noted physicist, who had found himself suddenly elevated to state leader after the failed putsch in Moscow in August 1991 but lacked popular support or the backing of a political party. The Popular Front (BPF) was large and active and mounting a petition for new elections to replace the old assembly elected in 1990. The BPF placed the problems caused by Chernobyl in Belarus at the top of its agenda.

My host was an association called "Children of Chernobyl" – a very familiar name in this period as there were probably a dozen similarly named organizations. This particular one was under the leadership of Gennady Grushevoy (Hienadz Hrushavy), an ethnic Russian and a professor of philosophy, who had been part of the Popular Front and the Belarusian national revival movement. The event was held in the Yubileinaya Hotel, on the street then adorned with the name Masherau Praspekt. On the podium in front of the Children of Chernobyl, Grushevoy presided, young (he was 42) but balding and with a moustache and what seemed at that time a brusque and somewhat condescending attitude, though subsequently I realized this description was a complete misrepresentation of his character.

The Congress was a little disappointing, for the same reasons as in Kyiv, namely that there were no attempts by the scientists speaking to make their findings comprehensible to a lay audience. Many would rush through overhead charts and graphs claiming to show the impact of additional radiation on various parts of the body. There were also more politically oriented offerings opposing nuclear power – in fact an anti-nuclear power sign hung in the background for the duration of the congress. Belarus did not have a nuclear power station of its own, but the Moscow Ministry of Power and Electrification had authorized the construction of a nuclear-powered heating station on the road between Minsk and its international airport.

The occasion was an eye opener in terms of contact between locals and the few selected Westerners in attendance. We (Germans and Canadians) were in big demand for social occasions and it was wonderful to be invited to the homes of various attendees. I stayed at the home of two professors at Minsk Linguistic University, Uladzimir and Tamara Tiomkin, and met numerous people who later became close friends, including Lyuba Pervushina, at that time a violinist with the State Orchestra, Yourie and his wife Mila Pankratz,

[12] Stanislau Shushkevich (b. 1934), a Doctor of Physics and Academician, who served as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus in 1991–1994. Along with the presidents of Russia and Ukraine, Boris Yeltsin and Leonid Kravchuk, he initiated and signed the Belavezha Agreement of December 1991, forming the Commonwealth of Independent States that brought about the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Katya Stulova, and Seriozha Lapteu.

In December 1993, I teamed up with a University of Alberta Hospital pediatrician, Dr. Ernest McCoy, a small, vigorous man of 69 years, and we visited several Minsk clinics. At the Belarusian Republican Center for Cancers of the Thyroid Gland, director, E.P. Demidchik provided us with detailed evidence of the spread of thyroid cancer among children, noting that its cause, radioactive iodine, had spread through the air in the first days after Chernobyl, embracing most regions of the republic. Only Viciebsk in the north was outside its range. Around 5,000 children had fallen victim to this cancer by the early 1990s. Most scientists concur that this illness among children was the most discernible medical consequence of Chernobyl, and caused from fallout in the first few days after the accident. Belarus lacks iodine in the soil so children's thyroids took it in through the air. The children most susceptible were conceived and under the age of five by April 1986, thus providing a readily discernible group for future monitoring.

McCoy had stayed with the Tiomkins during the visit and brought a leg of frozen Alberta beef to Minsk, which he wanted to cook for his hosts. We were invited to the home of Yourie Pankratz for the occasion of our leaving the city, and McCoy prepared an elaborate meal. It proved very difficult to find all the ingredients in Minsk and he spent some hours at Komarovsky Market. Having cooked it, he donned a three-piece suit that he later told me had cost over $2,000 and we prepared for a celebration. All went well until Pankratz decided to open a bottle of his home-made wine. The cork came off like a champagne bottle and wine came spurting out. Pankratz turned around and quite unintentionally fired the entire contents directly at McCoy, who gasped for his breath in horror as his suit changed to a bright red color. The rest of the room collapsed with laughter.

McCoy was ambitious and wanted to pursue a more in-depth study of children's health in Belarus. He was convinced that he could get support from the Canadian government, as he had done with an earlier Chernobyl-related project in Ukraine with a team of Edmonton-based doctors. We applied for funding and were offered $100,000. I was elated but he was not satisfied. "I can get more," he said. "Trust me." But our next application for $200,000 was firmly rejected. Moreover, we could no longer abide by the original request having submitted a second one. Thus, a promising project came to nothing.

At this same time, however, I did publish my most ambitious paper on the health consequences of Chernobyl in this republic. Entitled "A Correlation between Radiation and Health Problems in Belarus?", it was published in *Post-Soviet Geography* (No. 5, 1993) and noted some of the unexpected

consequences of the disaster and the divisions within the scientific community that had emerged as to their origins. It also noted that thyroid gland cancer among children was now widely accepted as the most discernible consequence of increased levels of Iodine-131 in the atmosphere in the first week after the explosions.

In an interview earlier in the year with Arnold Beichman and published in *The Washington Times* (February 13, 1993), I had described the political conditions of Belarus as follows – my comments in quotation marks and Beichman's text:

> "Whether Belarus constitutes a national state is debatable." What is not debatable, he says, is that Belarus "is very much a nation in chains." It is the most militarized state in the former Soviet Union. Its secret police is not only active, but openly works with the former KGB in Russia. In fact, the chairman of the KGB recently charged that goodwill organizations in Belarus were recruiting agents of influence and that foreigners working in the Chernobyl area were really collecting intelligence for their governments. While the voice of the KGB is heard in the land, says Mr. Marples, "the democratic voice in Belarus is struggling to be heard beyond the borders of the country."

Grushevoy held another congress in 1994, notable because that time in Minsk also featured the campaigning for the first presidential election campaign, eventually won by Aliaksandr Lukashenka The organization lent its support to the campaign of Shushkevich, one of two democratic candidates – the other was Zianon Pazniak – who inevitably split the vote of the democrats, thus allowing Lukashenka a comfortable lead on the first ballot, and then a run-off against Kebich in the second round, an event of significance for the future study of the Chernobyl disaster. The victory of Lukashenka did not appear particularly tumultuous initially: like Pazniak and Shushkevich, he was an outsider to the hierarchy, a low-level functionary, and he had socialized with Social Democratic circles. Grushevoy described him as a fringe politician desperate to be appointed to a position but without any real supporters before the independence period.

A third Chernobyl congress in 1996 proved to be too sensitive for the authorities (attendees included Ali Hewson, wife of Bono, the lead singer of U2, and Adi Roche, who heads the Irish Chernobyl Children International group). The atmosphere was quite tense. One doctor was refused permission to deliver his paper, and at one point the microphones were abruptly switched

off. By then I had become much more aware of Chernobyl-related problems in Belarus having visited various hospitals and clinics, and interviewed doctors and scientists. Adi had interests in both Ukraine and Belarus and at one time travelled to the region in an Irish ambulance her group had acquired. She was passionate and devoted to helping Chernobyl children, and attracted a lot of media attention to the cause. Having Ali alongside only enhanced her mission.

Grushevoy labored on long after his former friends from the Popular Front had departed the scene (Zianon Pazniak emigrated to United States in 1996, for example). On one occasion, his staff arranged for me to visit families in the contaminated zones of Mahilou region, accompanied by some members of the Fund. It was evident that these families had been living off the land since 1986. A few of their children had travelled abroad in the summers through the Fund, but most people had remained in their villages, though the local factory, which produced flax, had shut down.

There was general poverty in evidence and most of the males I encountered were drunk or sleeping. In one place, seven people slept in one room in the middle of the day, most of them ill, though not as a result of radiation brought from the Chernobyl reactor. In almost all the cottages, the reception was uniformly warm with tables set for a feast in each one – I forget how many "lunches" we ate but it was at least three. In some, small pigs would run freely through the cottage. The fear of radiation was manifested everywhere, as was the sentiment of gloom and hopelessness. I took a photograph of a more cheerful family of seven, which appeared in my first book on Belarus, *Belarus: From Soviet Power to Nuclear Catastrophe*, published in 1996. I was later reprimanded by a member of the Belarusian Society of Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, where I presented the book, for presenting too gloomy a picture, as highlighted by that particular photograph.

Grushevoy, in one of the many long conversations I held with him, attributed the pessimism less to radiophobia and more to the tradition in Belarus in depending upon state direction and largesse. Gorbachev's Soviet Union from 1986 to 1991, in the victims' view, had betrayed this trust by concealing the dangers of radiation and declining for three years to reveal the scope of its dissemination. Grushevoy's goal, which he emphasized most fully at the 1999 Congress of Children of Chernobyl, attended among others by the future Nobel Prize for Literature winner Svetlana Alexievich, was to set up self-help organizations at the grassroots level, something he had started to do in the early 1990s. These groups met at camps in the forest and were passionately anti-nuclear.

In 1997, however, Grushevoy's organization had fallen under government scrutiny and a special commission of the KGB was set up to investigate its operations. For several months, the KGB officials simply sat in the offices in Starovilenskaya Street in a restored older part of central Minsk and carried out audits (especially of its links with German organizations, where many children were sent for the summer months for recreation) while monitoring all facets of business. Ultimately, the Fund was evicted from the building and forced to operate, under a different name, out of a hotel room. Some of its leaders moved to Germany, with the help of partner organizations. The years 1997–2000 generally were a bleak time for NGOs in Belarus as the government began to become more authoritarian.

The Irish Chernobyl Children's Project, members of which I had met in 1996, incidentally, formed ties with government organizations and thus was permitted to continue. But despite its name its main work today is less with Chernobyl victims than in mental asylums where it has carried out fundamental changes as well as medical operations on the sick, either by flying in teams of doctors or transporting children to Ireland. In 2003, its leaders helped to produce the documentary *Chernobyl Heart*, directed by Maryann DeLeo, which won an Academy Award for Best Short Documentary. The film focused on cardiac degradation among children, though there is no verifiable link of this condition to additional radiation from the disaster.

Therein, however, lies a fundamental issue arising from the Chernobyl disaster: how many people did it actually affect through death, illness, or evacuation? That question pervaded the dozens of conferences and meetings I attended in places as far-flung as Tokyo, Kyiv, Minsk, Ottawa, London, Berlin, Munich, and throughout North America from Los Angeles to the White House. It was difficult to separate the issue from that of the future of nuclear energy and fiercely antithetical organizations such as the IAEA and Greenpeace, which disagree profoundly on the number of deaths to date from Chernobyl-induced radiation and the impact of low-level radiation.

The post-Soviet years have seen many border changes in Europe, mostly due to the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991. Border incidents are always daunting because there is a feeling of vulnerability at a border that does not occur in the normal walk of life. For a few moments someone has the proof of your identity, looks over it, and then decides whether it is worth allowing you to proceed. And then there is the equally unpredictable customs, which is not usually a problem in the EU countries, but was always and sometimes remains a serious hurdle in those of the former Soviet Union. I had a few border incidents in my early years visiting Belarus, which began slowly to open itself up to the notion that foreigners might wish to visit.

Border Crossings

It was the fall of 1992, and I was about to make my second visit to Belarus. I began at the Central Railway Station in Warsaw, currently an ornate building but at that time approaching dereliction, a place of drug lords and other criminal types, the homeless, and perhaps those left embarrassed by the economic shock therapy that was beginning to transform the Polish economy. The decision to enter Belarus by train was a result more of curiosity than anything else. And I had no visa, having read that it was possible to enter the country without prior accreditation and secure one on the border.

As I boarded the train, an official took me aside to give me a warning that there were criminals on board. He asked for my ticket, which had no specific seat assignment, nodded slowly, and then asked me to follow him. He found me a compartment for four people, occupied only by a man about 30, clad in a leather jacket, and then bid me farewell, with a strong suggestion not to venture far beyond my compartment. The train was headed for Moscow, but my part of the journey to Minsk was a total of 12 hours, and we departed at 9 am.

My companion proved very affable. Before we had crossed the Vistula he had reached into his bag and taken out a bottle of Bell's Scotch whiskey. He was a Pole from Warsaw and though he spoke no English and I no Polish, we conversed in Russian. He poured us both generous servings into the tea glasses provided and immediately dispensed with his. He then proceeded to tell me a melodramatic story about his Catholic upbringing and how he was traveling to Kazakhstan, against the wishes of his parents, to marry a Kazakh woman. I took a sip from the glass and then pushed it aside. The Pole refilled his glass, drank it, poured himself a second, then third, and within minutes was snoring on his bunk.

The next couple of hours passed peacefully and when I ventured into the corridor and looked out of the window, we were approaching the Polish border town of Terespol, though I was not aware of it at the time. I just saw many men in uniform on a platform waiting to board the train. They came in droves and before long there was a knock on our door, and I gave them my passport, at which they gave a peremptory glance before returning it. Their attention turned to the sleeping Pole. To say they slapped him around was an understatement. I was shocked at such treatment and having noted earlier that he had returned his passport to his briefcase after showing it to me, handed it over, which appeared to satisfy them. As for my friend, he had never even stirred. He began once again to snore quietly.

This traumatic arrival at the border gave me a false sense of security once they had departed and the train shunted forward once again. I returned to the corridor window to see what lay ahead and this time the welcoming party was considerably larger and even more unpleasant looking. They swarmed the train like locusts and before long two officials were in our compartment demanding passports. I had the Pole's ready and handed it to them. They were surprisingly much gentler with him than his own countrymen and seemingly satisfied. Finally, they turned to me.

"Where is your visa?"

"I don't have one."

"You have come to Belarus without a visa? What were you thinking?"

I mumbled that I had read somewhere I could acquire one at the border.

"When we get to Brest," they said, "we will come back for you."

With that, they left.

After a few more minutes we had crossed the Bug River and arrived at Brest station, a place with which I was to become very familiar over the coming years. This time three officials arrived, two very large and one quite short, and they marched me off the train onto the platform like a prisoner, one in front, one at my side, and one behind. As we walked, the train started to pull out again. I was horrified. I was told not to worry about the train, but I imagined my baggage, like the Pole, heading to Moscow.

"Why have you come here?" the smaller official asked. He was a young man and seemed genuinely inquisitive.

"I am an historian," I said, "I am interested in the history of your country."

He looked shocked. "We have no history here."

There was really no appropriate response and so I provided none.

Even though it was the middle of the day, everything inside the station was dark, no lights on anywhere and nothing open. I was told to wait outside an empty kiosk adorned with a fading sign that said "Visa." And I waited. After

about an hour, a figure descended some stairs on the other side of the station. Her hair was tied up 1950s style in a big bun over her head, and her face looked as though it had been dipped into a makeup bag. She was simply plastered in makeup with bright red lipstick. She entered the kiosk and the light went on. But the window remained closed. Thirty more minutes went by and it was hard not to panic. The train had evidently left without me and I was left only with my wallet and passport.

Suddenly the hatch opened and the woman demanded my passport and $60, which I handed over. She then took an instrument the size of a mallet and crashed it down onto the open page of the passport, making a splendid looking visa. I was truly in Belarus. The history-denier then reappeared, much friendlier in disposition.

“Come with me, David.”

We went to the platform and then down into a lengthy tunnel, which came out at another platform on the other side of the station. The platform was empty.

“Wait half an hour,” he said, as we shook hands. “The train will come back.”

I could do little else but stand forlornly but after 30 minutes I could see a shape on the horizon that eventually materialized into a train. My train. I had never been so pleased to see a train in my life. I bounded on board, found my compartment and was relieved to see everything intact, including my Polish friend, who was still comatose. To any regular traveler to these parts, it would have been evident that the train had left to change its wheels to the Russian tracks, which are wider than the European ones, a device it was once said, to deter foreigners from attacking. The statement is a myth, though the Nazi invaders of 1941 did find the wider gauge burdensome.

My Polish friend did wake up, though not until I alighted from the train in Minsk. He appeared at the window waving to me and wishing me luck. I often wondered whether he married the Kazakh woman.

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Two years later I was traveling in the opposite direction, from Minsk to Warsaw, once again on the train, which left Minsk in the early evening. Before leaving, friends had showered me with gifts, all of which were alcoholic in the shape of six bottles of vodka. At that time, it was the most appropriate and affordable gift. I packed them carefully in my suitcase, which I then put on the

top rack in my compartment. I was absolutely alone in the train and the journey was uneventful until we arrived at Brest. After a fairly lengthy stop, officials came on and made off with passports. When they would be returned was not immediately clear. It was by now very dark. The train then shunted to the sidings for the three-hour wheel change. It was a desolate scene, accompanied by the sound of hammering. Then my compartment door opened.

At the entrance was a large man in his 50s, wearing full military regalia. A KGB colonel, I thought, but I am no expert on uniforms. I was quite clearly his business for this particular journey. He sat down, awkwardly, and the interrogation began, all in Russian. Why had I visited Belarus? Who did I see? What was my business? He then made a comment that was unexpected.

“Give me your wallet!”

For any Westerner in the newly independent Soviet states in the early 1990s, this was not a question that prompted any ready response. I allowed myself a moment of composure, then reached into my coat and handed over my wallet. He examined it carefully. He then asked for my customs form and checked carefully the amount of money with which I had entered the country. Everything appeared to tally. One does not play games on customs forms. He sighed and then looked around the compartment. He saw the suitcase and asked me to take it down.

“Open it!” he shouted.

Once open he started feeling around with both hands. Before long he had found one of the bottles of vodka; then he found a second, third.

“How many bottles?” he asked.

“Six.”

“Six? You know this is illegal. Are you an alcoholic?”

I thought of answering that if I continued to visit collective farms I soon would be, but decided that a polite ‘no’ was the most sensible answer.

“Then why are you bringing six bottles of vodka out of Belarus?”

"They are gifts," I said.

"It's not allowed." This was perhaps the most exclusively Soviet statement in the lexicon.

And then we sat there, for what seemed an interminable period in the compartment on the dark wheel-less train in the bleak sidings of Brest station. I wondered if he was assessing his options or just trying to intimidate me. I had reasoned that my best course was to say nothing. And then just as suddenly as he had entered, he hoisted himself to his feet and left the compartment. Fifteen minutes later my passport was returned. Shortly thereafter the train sidled back to the station, preparing for the short trip to Warsaw.

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A few months later, by contrast, I was in Moscow for a conference, and decided to visit Minsk for the last portion of the trip. I was so busy in Minsk that I extended my time there and changed the date of my return home. The change did not present a problem, but it meant that my Russian visa had expired. One could still enter Russia from Belarus without any form of passport or visa control so I had no problems returning to Sheremetyevo-2. One should recall that the spring of 1994 was not Russia's happiest time. Its economy was struggling and its president, Boris Yeltsin, increasingly unpopular and in poor health. Sheremetyevo, like Brest station, was also quite dark, with no lights turned on and a massive crowd trudging forward toward passport control. I was hoping that the border guards would not be particularly discerning and that the expiry date on my visa form would not be closely examined. I was particularly buoyed by the fact that the guard looked like he was barely out of high school.

And indeed, I almost made it. He had the stamp in his hand ready to bring it crashing down when something made him pause. He re-examined my passport and uttered the words, in English, "Big problem." He then consulted with someone far more senior, and in front of sympathetic hordes, I was led away to a private room quite far away. It did look very serious and I was anticipating some sort of short-term detention. The officer's solemn expression was that of a hanging judge. We sat down at opposite sides of a table and he lit a cigarette. My excuse was that I had forgotten to renew my visa. There was nothing much else to say.

"Give me $90," he announced.

Ninety dollars US crossed the table, and he produced a stamp and extended my visa. But I was not dismissed. There appeared to be a serious difficulty judging by the frown on his face.

“Look,” he said, “I need to ask you something else.”

“Yes?”

About 30 seconds expired. I was by now in full panic mode.

“Can you help me emigrate to Canada?”

The tension in the room evaporated. Now he needed something from me, and though I could not offer much help, I could at least provide some basic information.

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Occasionally, it was possible to fly to Moscow from Minsk-1 Airport, close to the city center, and far more convenient than the 42-kilometer trip along the Moscow highway to Minsk-2. I found myself there in the mid-90s, large suitcase in hand. There were several passengers, but I was the only one with any baggage. It seemed that everyone else had carry-ons. I checked in to the flight and received a boarding card but the woman behind the desk never so much as glanced at my suitcase. It was about a minute before I saw a roughly dressed man behind a neighboring desk winking at me and rubbing his finger and thumb together. And a further 10–20 seconds passed before I realized his intention. I took out my wallet and gave him $2, all I had in small change. He seemed perfectly satisfied and whisked my suitcase away by hand. But where would it go, I wondered?

Eventually, a tractor appeared outside the airport window, pulling a large cart. The cart contained my suitcase. Off it chugged over to the other side of the airport where a decrepit propeller plane awaited it: the Belavia flight to Moscow.

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In Warsaw, perhaps a year later, I was once again travelling to Minsk by Belavia. The plane I had booked was not listed on the departures board so I went to inquire at the Belavia desk.

“Is there actually a flight to Minsk today?” I asked.

“Perhaps,” said the woman behind the desk.

“You are not sure?”

“Well it seems, yes, you are booked on it, second class. For $10 more you can fly first class.”

It seemed like a bargain, and the $10 duly changed hands. About ten minutes before departure, at around 9:50 am, we went through the gate and were assembled on the tarmac like rodents for about ten minutes. We then ascended up the stairs at the back of the plane, with our bags, which we left near the entrance. I looked in vain for my seat, but was asked to go forward, through a dirty looking curtain to the front of the plane, where the seats looked more or less the same as the back. I was deposited in the front row before a sort of cabinet with a large empty space behind it. A gold-toothed flight attendant then arrived down the aisle.

“Vodka or brandy, sir?”

I told her that I needed some tea.

I was then aware of a noise on the front stairs outside and left my seat to look through the window to see two men staggering upward with a very large TV set. They eventually arrived at the plane entrance and deposited the TV in the space directly in front of me. A video was inserted into it and “Men in Black” started playing, a 2-hour movie for the 50-minute flight. Belavia first class in the 1990s.

To the Kolkhoz!

I had settled comfortably into a work routine in Minsk on this, my fourth or fifth visit (1994), alternating between work and leisure, the former at the time mostly in the National Library, then in its old location, close to the presidential palace and the headquarters of the “Lukomol,” the patriotic Union of Youth, who occupied the former building of the Komsomol. A journalist friend who wrote for several opposition outputs, Vladimir, stopped at the apartment in which I was staying one day, and suggested that we visit a collective farm. It was something I had long wanted to do, having written my PhD dissertation on collectivization – albeit in western Ukraine rather than Belarus. As the days went by I had more or less forgotten this invitation.

One morning Vladimir returned. It was the day, he announced, to visit the kolkhoz. The trip had been carefully arranged. He had hired a minibus complete with driver, and we were accompanied by a man dressed immaculately in a grey suit, small and intelligent, who was interested in every aspect of our trip. It transpired that he was present at the behest of the collective farm rather than Vladimir, and obviously he was from the KGB. I learned gradually that much of my activity in Minsk was followed by the KGB, and appropriately enough, the kolkhoz was located near the settlement of Dzerzhinsk, the birthplace of Feliks Dzerzhinsky, the first leader of the Cheka, the original secret police established by Lenin in December 1917.

The farm was about an hour's drive from Minsk, and clearly well prepared for the visit of a foreigner. The place was spotlessly clean, the manager polite and attentive, as he showed me around the buildings and discussed his livestock. Not a single person on the farm was over the age of 45, he informed me, providing an impression that no one over that age could be trusted to work efficiently. The KGB man attended constantly, always adding some information and making notes. It was evident that this place was not only a model farm, but was the outstanding example in Belarus. I felt like I had seen my first Potemkin village.

The business of the day over, the attendees, including the chairman of the farm and of course our KGB friend, crammed into two vehicles and set off through the nearby forest until we reached an exquisite lake, with dachas alongside, evidently exclusive to the nomenklatura. One man informed me that Shushkevich used to have a dacha in this area to which, the state had alleged, he brought illegally obtained materials leading to his (trumped up) corruption charges that brought about his removal as state leader in January 1994.

The trunk of the car contained two large hampers of food: sausage, salad, cucumbers, bread and last but not least some very cold bottles of vodka. Everyone ate with gusto and then, standing, they prepared for a vodka toast. But it was not the usual vodka toast as a full 100 grams were poured into large glasses. And everyone was watching the foreigner intently. I should add at this point that I was a novice at such inductions. At the toast, I took a sip and the Belarusians scoffed in uproar. Was this the way Canadians drank? Was I trying to insult their offer of friendship? I emptied the glass.

A second toast followed. At that point, the world had become a much finer place, and I began to appreciate the beauty of the forest. The conversation was beginning to deteriorate somewhat and before long the KGB man was telling anecdotes, long and complicated ones but nonetheless extremely

funny. Unfortunately, I only recall one with any clarity. It was about the Yalta summit attended by Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin. Churchill was berating Stalin:

“Comrade Stalin, you must make some sacrifices to achieve your goals.”

“What do you suggest, Mr. Churchill?”

“How about giving up Crimea?”

Stalin looked pensive.

“I think that’s quite a reasonable suggestion, Mr. Churchill.”

“Thank you! The world will appreciate Josef Stalin as a moderate and wise leader.”

“One moment,” said Stalin, “We Russians are peaceful people and make concessions, but in return I wish to ask you a simple question. If you answer it correctly, we will give up Crimea.”

“That sounds fair, Comrade Stalin. What is your question?”

Stalin held up his thumb and two fingers: “Which one is the middle?”

Churchill gave the matter a moment and chose the forefinger. Stalin’s face broke into a delighted grin.

“I am sorry but you are wrong.” He promptly put his thumb in between the two fingers in the universal gesture of vulgarity: “This one is the middle.”

Vladimir was in the middle of proceedings and competing with the KGB man for attention. And so the evening continued. Or rather it didn’t because, as I was informed the next day, the Canadian guest suddenly disappeared and no one could find him. A lengthy search ensued. And eventually I was found, knee deep in the lake, alongside the driver of our car, who had not been imbibing. We were catching frogs! This was now the trip to the country’s best kolkhoz ended and to this day friends from Belarus bring up the incident with great delight. My subconscious passion for this ancient rural pastime had evidently surfaced.

Iryna

During one of my first visits to Belarus, Lyuba Pervushina had mentioned that her friend Alla's daughter, born in 1991, had a serious illness. Initially, Alla and her husband Aleksey Sokolov, believed the ailment was related to the Chernobyl disaster. But it transpired that the daughter, Iryna, had something called phenylketonuria (PKU), a very rare genetic disorder that can be inherited from healthy parents. It can be very dangerous if untreated, resulting in seizures, and brain retardation. Simply put, the child needs a carefully monitored diet that is low in protein. In Belarus in the early 1990s, that was particularly hard to attain.

As I got to know the family, it seemed to me I was in a good position to help, though it took me some time to reach this decision. Aleksey worked for the Ministry of the Interior, as a member of the vice squad, a particularly difficult task. He was unfriendly with me at first, saying that he had never met any foreigners before and did not trust them. He had a habit, after arriving home, of interrupting meals with a smoke break outside in the hallway of the apartment building, sometimes with friends. Gradually, however, he warmed to me, and we became, if not friends, then certainly more than passing acquaintances. Eventually, I joined him during the smoke breaks, albeit as a non-smoker. Alla was already quite a prominent doctor, and prepared to spend hours preparing meals for her daughter.

In Alberta, I started to search for places that might sell low-protein products. We had a store called Heart Smart, which was hard to find, and somewhat limited in the variety of products. But some University of Alberta doctors put me on a better track with advice that medications for PKU were used only to the expiration dates and then discarded. In fact, they remained viable long after such time, and could therefore be used. At the University of Alberta Hospital, I was able to amass a large quantity of such products. I took a few with me to Minsk the next time, and Alla approved. But the need was constant.

On the second return, I filled an entire suitcase with such products, hoping it would make its way through airport security. I doubt that such a shipment could be sent as regular baggage today, but in the 1990s, I had no problems. The customs office at Minsk International Airport was more interested in the Bailey's in my hand luggage. I had two bottles, which she said was illegal.

"Do you like Bailey's?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied.

I handed over one of the bottles, which she carefully transported to a corner of the customs zone. Once I was through, I was met by a team of Ministry of Interior men, plain clothes, and headed by Aleksey. They opened the case in front of the outcoming passengers and examined the packages, poking into the white powder. It could only have appeared like a drug raid to onlookers. Aleksey then shook my hand, took the case, and they all exited the airport. I felt satisfied that I had helped the family, and even more so as I watched Iryna grow, healthy, in the years ahead, into an intelligent and beautiful woman. The Irish Children of Chernobyl group also provided food supplies for a prolonged period. I remained close to both the Sokolov family and Lyuba over the coming years.

A few years later, I was asked to serve as an expert witness for a refugee hearing in Atlanta for a Belarusian woman who had presented documents to show she had been beaten by militia and treated in a local clinic, with a note signed by the relevant doctor. The would-be refugee maintained that her life would be in danger if she returned to Minsk because of her association with an opposition group. I met her, and believed her, but told the lawyer I would try to verify the documents once I was next in Belarus. Because of the Sokolovs, it was entirely feasible to do so. And perhaps to be expected, the documents turned out to be forgeries. The doctor who had allegedly signed the medical statement did not exist, at least in any clinic in Minsk. And Aleksey confirmed that the claimant was free to return to the city at any time: she had no criminal record and was not even under observation. The lawyer in Atlanta promptly ended all communications after I sent him the information. He did not wish to know.

Aleksey died at the age of 46, worn down it seemed by the pressures of his work. I will always remember him for his simple honesty and warmth beneath the rough exterior. He helped me dispel one preconceived notion: that because Belarus is an authoritarian state, then its officials must all be of the same ilk, committed to the regime and willing to follow orders to the letter. To the contrary, both among the authorities and the opposition, there are good and bad, there is no dividing line between them. That was also obvious in Communist times – at least after the Stalin era – which is why in some respects the transition from Communist to authoritarian or even to some form of democracy was not always difficult. People make adjustments.

10

With the Opposition in Belarus

Since Aliaksandr Lukashenka became Belarus' first and probably last president, those who disagree with his policies and have the effrontery to suggest that perhaps the country might like a new president after a quarter of a century are known as the 'oppozitsiia'. The term itself, when phrased by Lukashenka, sound like an obscenity, a motley group that is there to cause problems, undermine society, act as a fifth column for the West, takes western funds and competes for them with each other, and is generally a nuisance. Those who dig somewhat deeper would soon uncover something very obvious. There is no opposition, at least in terms of a unified movement with a common goal. Moreover, even the emergence of a new generation has not changed this dictum. It either follows the footsteps of its predecessor or else supports more radical actions. But it fares no better. It cannot get around the combination of political apathy, ingrained obedience to authority, and a fear of change. In addition, there is also fear itself.

I learned of this firsthand when giving a lecture in 1998 at the Belarus Economic University. It was a talk that was quite critical of the Belarusian government, which had become highly authoritarian. I had decided as a visitor to be as open as possible, not permitting myself to be limited to the niceties of decorum. I was free to do so. Still, I was taken aback by the size of the audience, some 200 students. And they looked like students anywhere, mostly clad in jeans and unkempt. There was one exception, a tall youth who was dressed in a blue suit, shirt, and tie, with a fierce expression on his face.

When scanning the room while speaking, I often caught his eye. The expression on his face never changed and it seemed obvious that he was either from the Union of Patriotic Youth or had been sent there by the KGB to report on my talk. I did not moderate my talk but by the end I had become increasingly wary and uncertain. There were dozens of questions, many asking how to emigrate to the West or about Western life in general. Some thought that Belarus and Canada were similar countries. Most seemed quite disillusioned with life in Belarus, disappointed that the fall of the Soviet Union had not brought a better life.

At last the suited student raised his hand. “Here it comes,” I thought, “the admonishment from on high.” He rose to his feet and cleared his throat, “I think,” he began, “that we are all doomed.” My suspicions instantly dissipated. He proceeded to lash out at the backward policies of the government and failure to reform the economy. The incident illustrated to me, a foreigner, that suspicion and fear in public situations still existed as it had in Soviet times. I was more than a little relieved. But my fear was still well grounded because other manifestations of the old Soviet system were still apparent, such as the monitoring of phone calls, and careful tracking of foreigners, especially those who associated with opposition figures or took part in demonstrations. At a similar talk I gave at the European Humanities University in Minsk, some professors had walked out.

In 1992, I had attended a meeting with Stanislav Shushkevich in the parliament building in Independence Square, along with, among others, Ivonka Survilla, who is head of the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, one of the oldest surviving governments in-exile. At that time, Shushkevich was the leading statesman of Belarus as the Chairman of the Parliament. It was under his leadership that Belarus declared independence on August 25, 1991, and renamed itself from the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) to the Republic of Belarus. He was aged 57 at this time, a bustling little man, a renowned physicist who had moved into politics. No sooner had he greeted us than Ms. Survilla stopped him with a phrase I had last heard in Kyiv: “Esteemed Stanislau Stanislavavich, have you forgotten your native language?” Shushkevich looked startled, but switched instantly from Russian to Belarusian, a language in which he was comfortable but clearly less so than in Russian.

Shushkevich is linked with the first years of independence, which Lukashenka likes to paint as years of disaster and corruption, a time when many former Soviet states made the mistake of trying to emulate the West and introducing shock therapy and market reforms, which ended – in Russia at least – with economic collapse. His time in high office was brief, and he was removed, as noted, on trumped up charges early in 1994, then placed fourth in the ensuing presidential election campaign with just over 10% of the vote. At that time over 1.4 million residents voted for the opposition candidates, Shushkevich and leader of the Belarusian Popular Front Zianon Pazniak, perhaps the only accurate reflection of the popularity of the opposition in post-independence Belarus. Thus about 25% of the country voted for them at a time when establishment figures like Prime Minister Viacheslau Kebich and the leader of the parliamentary commission on corruption, Lukashenka, were leading the race.

Shushkevich has recently written his memoirs, which should soon appear in

English translation. As much as any single individual other than Gorbachev, he carries responsibility for ending the Soviet Union. I had a second interview with him in October 1996, once again in his office in the parliament building, this time as a member of the opposition. He explained at that time how he served as the intermediary between the leaders of Russia and Ukraine, both of whom he brought to the Belavezha forest hunting lodge, where former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev used to hunt wild boar. It was the first time, he noted, when leaders of Russia and Ukraine recognized the independence of Belarus, albeit for negative reasons. Kravchuk could not have met with Yeltsin alone and anticipated Russian recognition of the independence of Ukraine. Yeltsin was anxious mainly to hold a meeting without the presence of Gorbachev, who would have whined about a revised Union agreement. The result was the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, an agreement of dubious legality, creating a meaningless entity soon forgotten, but nonetheless signing the death warrant of the crumbling Soviet state.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, the various links between its component states ended. Belarus had been a center for machine building and refineries. Almost overnight its secure ties with Russia in particular became uncertain. Moreover, there was considerable nostalgia for the Soviet state, linked in part to memories of the wartime victory and the legends engendered in the Brezhnev period about the heroics of partisans and underground resistance. The new state seemed alien to many, and the new state language introduced in 1990 – Belarusian – utterly foreign. As the country entered a period of economic uncertainty, it was Shushkevich who became the principal target of the critics in parliament. He had few supporters, unlike Pazniak, who had the backing of the Popular Front.

Pazniak was the most popular figure among Belarusians in the diaspora, but in his own country his brand of fiery ethnic nationalism was considered extreme by some. A tall ascetic looking man, he was 50 years of age when he ran for president in 1994. Already he had achieved much. In addition to being a co-founder of the Front ‘Revival’ movement, he had rediscovered the mass graves at Kurapaty and published a famous article in the literary newspaper (Literature and Art) with Jauhien Smyhaliou entitled ‘Kurapaty – The Road of Death’. The article, which claimed that up to 100,000 corpses were buried in mass graves in this suburb of Minsk, caused a sensation. The article reported the following:

On the hills there stood an old stand of conifers, surrounded by broadleaf trees and thickets. Some 10 - 15 hectares of the coniferous stand had been surrounded by a fence, more than 3 meters high, made of closely fitting, overlapping, wooden planks, with barbed wire on top. Outside the fence were

guards and dogs. The people were brought there along the gravel road which ran from the Lahoj highway to Zaslauje. They used to call it the “Road of Death.”

Questioning the people of Zialony Luh and neighboring villages – Cna-Jodkava and Drazdova – observers and witnesses of these terrible events – helped us to establish not only the facts, but even to plot the scenes of the mass murders. But in the 1970s, to go public, to tell everyone about this, was impossible.

In 1987–1988, we located several former inhabitants of Zialony Luh, which by now had been demolished, and once again we questioned old people and witnesses of the events in neighboring villages, we elucidated circumstances and details, and recorded the answers.

The shootings began here in 1937. At first, three times a day – at dawn, at 2.00 p.m. and in the evening, at dusk. They brought a few truck-loads of people into the forest and shot them. They threw down the corpses, as ordered, into deep pits which had been dug there, layer upon layer. when they had shot enough to fill the pits right up, they put a layer of sand, not more than 20–25 cm thick, on top of it. Sometimes they planted pine saplings on top.

In the second half of 1937, they enclosed the site. They began to carry out the killings according to a different timetable: after lunch, in the late afternoon, and all through the night. The transports went on rolling up, every day, without a break on Sundays. “They used to shoot every day,” – says Kaciaryna Mikalajeuna Bahajcuk (born 1919), a resident of Cna-Jodkava, – “and the trucks went on roaring. Sometimes, in the evenings, when the men came home, they would go out into the yard and listen to the shooting; they would talk about it quietly, grieve together, and disperse.”

Having exposed such a crime, one might have expected an uproar, and indeed in Belarus there were public marches to the Kurapaty site and demands for further investigations. The Belarusian Popular Front made the massacres an integral part of its program of national revival. Yet, it was not possible, in the Belarus of the late 1980s to mid-1990s to delve deeply into a Stalinist crime of 1937–1941. The links between the modern state and the Soviet one had never been thoroughly severed. The Commission set up to investigate the crime, to which Pazniak was added, composed mostly of former party leaders, military leaders, and public figures. Very few of them were interested in ascertaining the truth. Pazniak felt himself hounded once Lukashenka came into power and within two years had fled into exile, where

he has remained, mostly in Warsaw, though he has refugee status in the United States. Unlike many others who followed similar paths, he has never returned.

Without Pazniak there was no obvious leader of the opposition within Belarus itself. Moreover, there had been a natural tendency in the late 1990s to form political parties, which then subdivided into smaller groups. The Social Democrats are a classical example since most Belarusians, if they express political views at all, fall somewhere within the confines of socialist democracy. Lukashenka, according to a story once told to me by Grushevoy, was on the margins of this group in 1990, desperately seeking support to run as Vice Chairman of the Parliament, but was not taken very seriously. By the mid-1990s there were three separate branches of the Social Democratic Party.

In the late 1990s, divisions between the president and the parliament widened. According to the Constitution, elections had to be held every five years. But in 1996, after the president amended the Constitution, he also altered this term to date from the time of the referendum, meaning that he had an additional two years before he needed to call an election. The opposition did not recognize these constitutional changes and the confrontation became serious. Many former allies of Lukashenka now began to oppose him. The question, then as now, was how to unite the opposition, but within these groups there was very little impetus to follow one leader. The opposition included not only people in the Popular Front – who could be termed ethnic nationalists – but also the Communists on the left with their long-time leader Siarhei Kaliakin. There did not appear to be much hope of making a common cause between all these groups, all of which were fairly small and struggling to gain influence among the general population, which tended to regard all politicians with intense suspicion.

In this period, an important role was played by an office that is today virtually defunct, the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group. It had an office in the IBB hotel southwest of the city that was designed by a German architect. Its head was a seasoned German diplomat called Hans-Georg Wieck, who was a former German ambassador to the USSR. White haired and slim, and quite short in stature, Wieck was a determined and energetic emissary who took his duties very seriously. I met him on several occasions and gradually we became quite friendly. He perceived as one of his goals the uniting of the opposition on the grounds not that Lukashenka needed to be overthrown, but that a strong opposition was healthy for democratic development.

In this way I began to take part in activities involving the opposition. In truth, I

was more inclined to socialize and associate with them than any government figures, had that even been possible. Staff members at the US Embassy were also involved in such projects, including the then ambassador Daniel Speckhard, and especially his wife, Anne Speckhard, who took up the mantle with great enthusiasm. Daniel had the title of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and took up office in August 1997, i.e. just after the controversial referendum and prior to the troubled period of 1999–2000, in which he was to play a subsidiary role. As there was no Canadian Embassy in Minsk – the closest one was in Warsaw – I frequently met with the Speckhards and found them to be excellent hosts and friends.

One evening I was invited over for dinner to their home in the suburb of Drazdy with a Belarusian friend and they described how their house had been subject to sudden power cuts and gas shortages. The president's residence at that time was nearby and regularly they would see Lukashenka jogging around the neighborhood. Evidently, he resented such proximity and later he forced all the foreign diplomats to leave the Drazdy complex by cutting off heat and water and closing off roads. The moves affected the ambassadors of most EU countries as well as the United States, but not the Russian Federation because the Russians owned the house in which their ambassador was residing. Subsequently, Speckhard and the EU ambassadors departed from Minsk in protest. The Europeans returned after a suitable period but Speckhard did not.

Meanwhile Wieck soldiered on, despite his critics, and organized a conference on possible liaisons between the Belarusian government and the opposition, as well as democratic reforms. I was invited to attend and for the first time was whisked through the International Airport into the VIP lounge and then a waiting vehicle. We then labored for several days on various facets of Belarusian political and economic life, with reports presented and then discussed in groups of around ten people. One conclusion was that Belarus was in a strong position for economic reform with a well-educated population, relatively few debts – at least compared to a country like Ukraine – and had remained relatively free of the corruption that had overrun its neighbors to the east and south. The idea of common goals was attractive to many, but unsurprisingly not the ruling authorities headed by the president. Before long, Wieck was presented in vicious fashion on the television program *Panarama* in the form of a Western agent trying to undermine the Belarusian leadership.

In 1999–2000, I visited Belarus several times, and tensions escalated between the president and a now much broader opposition that included some of his former close associates, such as Deputy Chairman of the

Supreme Soviet Viktar Hanchar, who had been his campaign manager in the 1994 presidential elections. On May 7, 1999, Yuri Zakharanka, who had been the Minister of Interior before being replaced in 1995, was abducted in Minsk and, as reported subsequently by a former member of the ministry who fled to Germany, he was killed on the orders of the president. One of the killers, in exile, later described the murder in lurid detail.

Later in the same month, the Minsk authorities sanctioned an open-air concert in the Niamiha area. I was driven by earlier in the day by Yulia Shymko, whom I had met through the Irish Chernobyl Children's group, and crowds were starting to gather. Alcohol was being served even though the ages of those assembled appeared to be in the early teens and sometimes younger. Later I noted how quickly the skies had darkened and presently a massive thunderstorm ensued. The storm brought about one of the darkest tragedies in modern-day Belarus. As the youngsters fled into the Niamiha metro station, a train arrived carrying passengers who were heading up the escalators. The ensuing crush brought about the deaths of at least 53 people – the official total – and probably many more, all young teenagers. Today a carving of flowers at the entrance to the station captures something of the horror of the event. But the Minsk authorities managed to evade blame for an unspeakable human tragedy that even today resonates among many residents.

In August 1999, the Supreme Soviet originally elected in 1990 declared that Lukashenka's term as president had ended and appointed Syamyon Sharetski, chairman of the parliament, as acting president pending new elections. By this time Sharetski had moved to Lithuania. On September 16, Hanchar, who was now in theory the leading official residing in the country, was abducted in Minsk, along with his friend, the businessman Anatol Krasouski. Neither man has ever been seen again and they are presumed murdered on the orders of Lukashenka, most likely by the security forces. The disappearances represented the culmination point of the tyranny in Lukashenka's Belarus, though by no means the end of it.

The presidential elections were now scheduled for 2001, the fifth anniversary of the controversial amendments to the Constitution, which incidentally were to be followed in 2004 by another referendum allowing Lukashenka to run for office beyond the officially guaranteed two terms. In 2000, I again visited the office of Ambassador Wieck, who had shrugged off the abusive depictions of him on official TV, and had become decidedly disillusioned with the Lukashenka presidency. He informed me, logically, that the best option was a unified opposition candidate who had some clear connections to the industrial workforce. The choice was the Chairman of the Trade Unions of Belarus,

Uladzimir Hancharyk, a 59-year old politician from Lahoisk. The choice astutely sidestepped the leaders of the numerous political parties who were constantly reviled in the official media. The other popular choice, Siamion Domash (born 1950), a former mayor of the city of Hrodna, quickly withdrew to allow the opposition to unite.

The outcome, unsurprisingly, was another victory for Lukashenka, one carefully engineered by the authorities in the first of several elections that went largely unrecognized in the democratic world. Nevertheless, Hancharyk, who lacked public speaking skills and appeared uncomfortable in the role of presidential candidate, garnered almost 1 million votes according to official totals, and he was leading the polls in the city of Minsk just prior to the vote. It turned out to be Wieck's last stand because his accreditation was not renewed for another term and the powers of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group were greatly reduced on the orders of the angry president.

Western Scholars and the Opposition in Belarus

Anyone trying to make sense of opposition politics in Belarus runs up against the problem of the plethora of parties, official and unregistered, and rivalry between the various leaders. Analyst Grigory Ioffe, who could reasonably be presented as an admirer of Lukashenka, and even a friend, frequently dismisses the opposition as a group of greedy individuals fighting with each other for handouts from Western agencies supporting democracy. The viewpoint overlooks the conditions in which they operate and dismisses the incredible fortitude with which they continue to work in an atmosphere of either constant harassment or outright repression. On the other hand, they do suffer from longevity in their positions (the Popular Front being a notable exception).

My acquaintance with the opposition is not as close as that of French scholar Alexandra Goujon, who once gave me an account of a very entertaining train journey in their company. Gradually, however, I have either made the acquaintance or come to know well most of those who comprise the opposition, sometimes in the most unlikely of circumstances. I have already described the two meetings with Shushkevich, whom I did not encounter again at close quarters other than the fact that we once travelled on the Minsk-Vienna flight together. Others I met during my early years in Belarus were Vladimir Glod, a brilliant journalist with Belapan, and Oleg Manaev, the sociologist who founded the polling agency National Institute for Socio-Economic and Political Research. Strictly speaking Manaev is not a member of the opposition, he is an academic, as was illustrated by an incident in Bratislava over a decade ago. He is also now in exile in the United States,

following attacks on his company by the authorities that made it impossible for it to continue population research.

In the summer of 2004, I was invited by the Latvian Foreign Ministry to attend a meeting in Riga, devoted to the question of democracy in the former Soviet space. Many figures from the Belarusian opposition were in attendance, including Mikalai Statkevich, General Valery Fralou, Andrei Sannikau, Anatol Liabedzka, Oleg Manaev, and Uladzimir Padhol. Senator John McCain was making a keynote speech, and there were delegates from the United States representing the International Republican Institute, including Lindsey Graham, Susan Collins, and John Sununu, as well as Latvian officials, and at least two representing the Lukashenka government. The Americans had been refused visas to enter Belarus. Thus, it was one of the few occasions of open discussion between members of the government and opposition.

McCain's speech was predictable. He denounced Lukashenka as a tyrant who should be removed from power as well as for arresting and detaining opposition activists. Lukashenka had introduced a climate, in his words, "of fear, repression, and arbitrary rule." After the main speeches, some panels had been arranged, and one featuring members of the opposition was to have been chaired by Vladimir Socor, my former colleague from RFE/RL and the Salzburg Seminar. Socor unexpectedly asked to be absolved from that duty, since I was present and, he insisted, a much stronger specialist on Belarus. It was a kind gesture but placed me in the unprecedented position of moderating a panel of the main opposition leaders before an international audience, at least one of which was relaying the proceedings back to the Belarusian KGB. My involvement with groups seeking an end to the Lukashenka regime was in fact only beginning.

I had attended a workshop in Slovakia in 2006, organized by the German Marshall Fund of the United States' office there, led by former Foreign Minister Pavol Demes. The gathering preceded the next presidential election when once again there were attempts to unite the opposition around a single candidate, in this case a Hrodna professor named Aliaksandar Milinkievič. Manaev was presenting the results of his latest surveys and all should have been well. There were no invited representatives from the Belarusian government; rather a coterie of opposition activists, leaders of democratic initiatives, diplomats, and the odd scholar (me) were in attendance.

Nevertheless, when it came to question time, the chief interrogator was Andrei Sannikau, leader of the European Belarus movement (and later a presidential candidate in 2010). He berated Manaev for his presentation, saying his statistics were "unhelpful" and only of benefit to the government.

Visibly flustered, Manaev responded that he was a scientist, and his figures were based on research, not politics. Sannikau was unfazed by the comment, and maintained that the polls only benefited the government, which controlled the conditions in which they were undertaken. The following day Sannikau, Manaev, and I were members of a panel at the Foreign Ministry of Slovakia. The two were no longer on speaking terms. On the way back to the hotel, I had to walk in the middle so that they did not have to communicate with each other, and I heard later that they had taken separate trains home, such was their mutual hostility. It was unfortunately a typical example of how easily rifts could develop between the various opposition leaders.

Pavol Demes arranged several meetings to discuss Belarus, involving internal players and public activists, with a few scholars added to the mix. The GMF was funding a number of newspapers and journals within Belarus, as well as some informal groups such as environmental associations. In 2006, Pavol, Joerg Forbrig (who heads the Berlin office of GMF), and myself published an edited book on *Prospects for Democracy in Belarus*, which came out just weeks before the 2006 elections, during which Joerg joined oppositionists in the tent protest on October Square following the announcement of results with Lukashenka again returned to office. The authorities broke up the camp several days later.

Minsk in the late 1990s had been a rare place to find foreign scholars. The only one I saw there regularly was Rainer Lindner, who organized the German-sponsored Minsk Forum, which eventually prompted the participation of the Belarusian government, mainly through Foreign Minister, Uladzimir Makei. But in the late 1990s there was a sudden wave of activity in the West, spurred by the dramatic events in Belarus. Conferences followed at Harvard University, and the University of Bath in the UK, both of which published many of the papers presented in book form. Still, the number of Western scholars, born outside Belarus, was relatively meagre: Jim Dingley (UK), Astrid Sahm (Germany), the already mentioned Alexandra Goujon (France), Andrew Wilson (UK), Grigory Ioffe (US), and Stephen White (UK) were the most prominent names.

My main contact among the opposition was with political scientist Padhol, an imposing bald man of casual appearance and frenetic energy. He was and remains the essence of a political animal, though there are many sides to him. A political analyst for the Belarusian Popular Front, he is the author of many articles, books, and especially ventures into Belarusian folklore. He is perhaps best known for his popular book series of quotes from the president, which has appeared in multiple editions, published by a firm in St. Petersburg.

Padhol can walk into a room and start a discussion almost instantly, setting aside any niceties or introductions. He knows well every Western ambassador in Minsk and has met most of them personally at their homes. In this same period of the late 1990s, he invited me one afternoon to the residence of the German ambassador to Belarus, Horst Winkelman, who had coordinated the departure of European ambassadors from Drazdy after their water supplies had been cut off. He now lived in a pleasant house in the west of the city and had prepared an outdoor meal for his two guests. He was a polite and formal diplomat, extremely courteous, and very interested in politics.

Padhol surveyed the food table like a lion looking over a delectable antelope. There were plates filled to the brim with ham, and it was clear that he did not quite comprehend how to undertake the process of transferal from plate to mouth. Eventually he spread out his enormous hand over both sides of the plate, enclosed the entire ham in it and consumed it in a single mouthful. Winkelman observed the phenomenon but appeared completely unmoved. Padhol then drank the entire bottle of red wine on one side of the table and started into the white on the other. All the time the discussion focused on the political situation and how to resolve the current impasse.

On another occasion, Padhol and I took a bus from the western part of Minsk into the center. It was so crowded that we were standing on the steps of the central exit door. Padhol suddenly bellowed:

“Lukashenka says this bus has to go to the terminal without stopping!”

The entire bus went silent for about two minutes. Then there was some worried whispering.

The woman next to us remarked:

“Lukashenka is a relative of mine.”

We were interested and encouraged her to continue:

“Yes, he is Aleksandr Gregorovich and I am Ludmila Gregorievna.”

On Saturdays, leaders of the opposition and some friends would play soccer in the Park Chaliukintsau on a red clay surface with proper goal nets. The pitch was small and the game played with passion and energy. The rivalry there matched anything in the political arena and took place in the growing

heat of mid-day. I noted that the shirtless center forward on the opposite team to mine was always close to goal, in a position that would be offside in a regular game with a referee. Nevertheless, without fail, he missed every chance to score. His name was Anatol Liabedzka, and he was the leader of the United Civil Party, who took over the party leadership around the same time the current leader, Hienadz Karpenka, had a sudden cerebral hemorrhage in March 1999, yet another death that the opposition attributes to foul play. Liabedzka has been arrested so many times for various offenses that he has likely lost count of the number.

The aforementioned Sannikau and I got off to an unfortunate start because of an article I had co-authored with Padhol – and largely written by him, as I served mainly as a translator – that was critical of some of his activities, even implying that he worked for the KGB. But I met him personally at the conference held by the Latvian Foreign Ministry in Riga, and subsequently at many gatherings in Europe, including the one in Bratislava and was able to smooth relations. Sannikau is linked with Charter-97, perhaps the most outspoken media outlet in terms of criticisms of the Lukashenka presidency. He was formerly a Deputy Foreign Minister, a brooding, quiet-spoken man in his 60s married to a well-known journalist, Iryna Khalip, and with two sons. In some respects, he is a protégé of Shushkevich, and the two formed a close alliance in the 2010 presidential election, which proved to be yet another time of crisis in Belarus.

In the 1990s, I published two books on Belarus. The first was a general history that incorporated the impact of Chernobyl as explained by the title: *Belarus: From Soviet Rule to Nuclear Castastrophe*. It was my fifth and final book published by the Macmillan Press and its partners, with the Canadian edition in this instance taken up by the University of Alberta Press. The second book was part of a series that appeared under the imprint of Harwood Academic Publishers, based in Amsterdam. The editor of the series imposed a strict word limit, which meant that a final chapter I had prepared on relations with Russia had to be omitted. The title – *Belarus: A Denationalized Nation* – originally ended with a question mark, making it more emphatic than I had intended. Though smaller than its predecessor in size, its focus on contemporary politics rendered it more accessible to many agencies in Belarus, and it was used by foreign embassies as a primer for those starting a sojourn in Minsk. This was a lesson for me, namely that the future of one's books – or articles – can never be determined in advance. I became known throughout Belarus through this one book even though I had never imagined it as a text that would have much influence.

Through Yulia Shymko's father, Aleksandr, a professor in Minsk, I was able to

gain access to the National Archives of Belarus, which enhanced my knowledge of the interwar period in particular. The documents I found were not categorized in any meaningful way, but obtained largely by chance from the general subject area of "reunification of Belarusian lands in September 1939," but they were very frank about the continuing purges, especially of the Ministry of Education in what was then termed "western Belorussia." Though my stay was limited by having to return to teaching duties in Canada, Yulia made further visits and photocopied numerous documents for me. The service there was hardly amicable. Every time I wanted to copy a document I was asked for a written explanation and the process was laborious. The KGB Archives, which would have been equally valuable, had been closed in 1994 when Lukashenka took office. There were firm limits to what one could study in Belarus.

Still, one could talk to people. Two of the notable interviews Yulia and I conducted in the late 1990s were with Svetlana Alexievich, the mercurial writer, and passionate critic of the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster; and, perhaps by contrast, Natalia Masherova, daughter of Piotr, former party leader of Soviet Belorussia in the period 1965–1980. Alexievich had not yet acquired the fame that arrived with her Nobel Prize in Literature (2015), but was a fierce and unabashed critic of Lukashenka. She talked virtually nonstop for about two hours and at such a speed that it was impossible to keep pace – we used a tape recorder.

Masherova was a popular candidate in the 2001 presidential election, but had dropped out suddenly, accused by Lukashenka of "stabbing him in the back." Lukashenka sometimes made the analogy between himself and Masherau, both populists who led the republic for long periods. Masherau had been killed in car crash in 1980, which some attributed to a political murder conducted by more faithful followers of the Brezhnev leadership. Masherau, a devout Communist, had distanced himself from the corruption in the Moscow hierarchy. Natalia told us, frankly, that she had feared for her life and opted to withdraw.

11

Yakutsk

I spent a lot of time in Russia in the 1990s, mostly in Moscow, an ever-changing city, in a state, it seemed, of almost permanent political chaos. As Russia's first president, Yeltsin had struggled. His leadership began with a bitter tussle with the parliament, which ended in 1993 with him turning tanks on the Russian White House and the death of about 150 people inside. He also resorted to selling off state assets at low prices to attain economic stability. Prime Ministers came and went, and Yeltsin himself suffered from poor health and spent many months in sanatoria. A Western-friendly policy prevailed in the early 1990s, and indeed it seemed impossible for the new Russian state to survive without Western aid.

One of my PhD students at Alberta, Aileen Espiritu, wanted to apply for a grant from the Gorbachev Foundation, formally linked to the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), to work on a project in eastern Siberia. Aileen, of Filipino background, had focused her thesis on the impact of Russian oil and gas development on the Khanty-Mansi people of Siberia. Her focus, on indigenous peoples of Russia, was not unknown, but from a Canadian perspective, was a bold and pioneering enterprise. Because of her work on health, environment, women, and the circumpolar north, she was hired by the University of Northern British Columbia with her PhD program at Alberta still in mid-course.

Her proposed project concerned the effects of diamond mining on the indigenous population in the regions around the Vilyuy River in eastern Siberia. But she could not apply for the grant without a PhD. Thus, she proposed to me that I be her research partner and the acting director of the project, which ran from 1996 to 2000. Its official title was "Yakutsk-Sakha and the Siberian Northeast: Resource Development, Environmental, and Health Issues." Aileen wanted to conduct interviews with indigenous people to establish a database. Our application was successful, and unlike McCoy, she was perfectly satisfied with the total of $100,000. I knew very little about the topic when we began. In fact, I did not visit the region initially. Aileen spent the

winter of 1996–1997 in Yakutsk in temperatures around -45° C and with only 2-4 hours of daylight.

I did, however, make two trips to Yakutsk. The first was an introductory one in 1997 and lasted only about a week, enough time to meet our partners from Yakutsk State University, as well as local host Aita, an indigenous woman. I began to reflect on this visit, which was unsatisfactory for me on a number of levels, because I had found it quite bewildering and a culture shock. I resolved to return for a longer period in 1998 and make more effort to understand the problems of the locals, as well as the attitudes of the regional Sakha government toward resource development.

Though very remote, the Republic of Yakutsk-Sakha is the largest region of the Russian Federation, encompassing about three million square kilometers – today it makes up half of the Far Eastern Federal District. It is enormously rich in resources, including diamonds (99% of Russian output, and about a quarter of the world's total), gold, coal, oil, gas, silver, and tin, but has a population of just under one million, about 25% of which resides in Yakutsk. Russian settlement there dates from the 17th century, and in 1998, the Russian and Sakha populations were roughly of equal size. Today, the Sakha population is higher than the Russian by around 100,000 people.

In the summer of 1998, I began my journey in Minsk, where I witnessed a protest demonstration by the Belarusian Popular Front in Gorky Park. I had asked a student who was working as a research assistant for my Belarusian projects, Yulia Shymko (mentioned earlier), to accompany me to Siberia. I thought that it would be useful to have someone intelligent and knowledgeable around during interviews. Yulia, who today is a business professor in France with a doctorate in Business Administration, had originally been assigned to the Irish Children of Chernobyl group as a translator. She was exceptionally intelligent. Her father, Sasha, a professor of economics in Minsk, encouraged her to go, and accompanied us as far as Moscow.

We then took the six-hour flight from Moscow's Domodedovo Airport eastward to Yakutsk, encircling the massive Lena River and arriving to the frosty reception that was typical of Yakutsk Airport in the 1990s. Officials were particularly suspicious of Yulia entering the republic with a Belarusian passport, though one informed her that he was an admirer of Lukashenka, who provided a model for Russia to follow in terms of establishing law and order. Yulia had to go to another office to fill out registration forms, delaying our arrival at the Tyghyn Darkan Hotel, widely considered at the time to be the only luxury hotel in the city. I had stayed there the previous summer and had mixed feelings since whenever there was a guest considered important,

other guests would be moved around, usually to smaller rooms.

This year, Aileen and I had made arrangements to stay at the university hostel (*obshchezhitiye*). Our unit consisted of three rooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom. One room had been taken by a visiting graduate student from Vancouver, Aileen and Yulia took the largest one (Aileen was scheduled to leave shortly for Moscow, but delayed her return by several days), and I took the smaller one. The kitchen was bare, aside from a few spices, and the bathroom flooded every time someone took a shower. The toilet paper, incredibly, turned out to be a PhD thesis on coal mining in Neryungri, the second largest town in the republic, handwritten in blue ink. I began to read it on a daily basis – we had brought our own toilet paper – though it was not particularly interesting. There lies a lesson for all graduate students, I thought, 6-7 years of labor on a thesis, only for it to end up as toilet paper for foreigners in a hostel.

Yakutsk is an unusual city. Because of the permafrost, pipes cannot be laid underground. Thus, they were wrapped around buildings. Huge holes appeared along the roads and sidewalks were undulating. Presumably anyone walking along the street today looking at a cell phone would encounter some spectacular tumbles. Cars had no interest in pedestrians and would scream by within inches if one walked along the roadside. Most of them were Japanese models, with the steering wheel on the right side. Thus, in theory, drivers had only limited vision of pedestrians. To walk a single block would leave one soaked in sweat, such was the intensity of the summer heat. Food was only available from the city market, open stalls behind which local women were prepared to haggle prices. Everything in Yakutsk was expensive because of the costs involved in transporting goods. Roads were impassable for lengthy periods of the year – all of winter and for the period of spring flooding. Restaurants were plentiful but often there was a surcharge to the local mafia simply for entering and taking a seat.

The noise also was constant. No one was sleeping during a time of year with about 20 hours of daylight. Radios played constantly, children roamed around, people played music, became drunk, and frequently there were knife and gun fights. It was the wild east. Our main partner, Aita, was visiting constantly and set up a series of meetings with officials and local activists. A proud indigenous woman of barely five feet in height, she would extol the virtues of Sakha and its people: “We are the chosen people. That is why the sun always rises in the east.” Her activity contrasted with that of our official host, the Rector of the Yakutsk State University, whom we would meet occasionally, usually for meals.

In our residence we had a *dezhurnaya*, Maria, who would do some cleaning, but more importantly, every night she would enter to spread a white powder along the pipes to kill the cockroaches. Whatever the substance consisted of, it was remarkably successful. An Englishman, John, in the next building, told me that the first thing he did every morning was shake the cockroaches off the blankets before getting out of bed.

One of the early meetings was with the head of the local archives, and involved a picnic on the bank of the Lena River. A group of about 20 had gathered there, driving their cars through a field in order to get closer to the river. To my astonishment several were actually bathing in the river, which was fast flowing and formidably wide. After some persuasion, I was obliged to join them and given Western sensibilities, I did not unclothe but entered dressed in shorts and a t-shirt. The head of the archives was a tiny man with a squeaky voice who kept insisting on toasts to various things before each course: to Sakha, Siberia, Canada, friendship, etc. Access to the archives was duly granted after the lengthy picnic but once there, I discovered they contained nothing later than 1960. There were no records of laws on exploration, for example.

At this time, the summer of 1998, Yakutsk gold miners were on strike for better wages and working conditions, and we would see them in the central square, close to the statue of Lenin. Most of the leading officials, such as the main ministers in areas such as health care and education, were all ethnic Sakha, but very often the second minister was Russian. In general, there seemed to be a strong resentment at Aileen's questions, and a defensive attitude, particularly with regard to the treatment of the so-called "small peoples of the north" as the Enets and Evenki, many of which were considered to be endangered in terms of ethnic survival. Some numbered only in the hundreds. The Enets numbered less than 400. The Sakha, by contrast, numbered about 400,000 and the president of the republic, Mikhail Nikolayev, whom I saw walking along during a visit to the theater without any security guards, was also of this nationality.

Much depended also on local assistance and the driver assigned to us was notable for his general slothfulness and bad driving. On several occasions he simply did not show up. We had been promised an environmental trip down the Lena River, with several stops en route but the driver decided on this occasion to absent himself. We were bitterly disappointed. We did visit the plush local hospital, where among other things, I was able to get some medical attention to my ear, having suffered a temporary deafness, mainly because of black fly stings. I had heard about black flies from Canada's Northwest Territories, but had never visited there. Thus, they were something

of a shock. Once outside the city, the moment one alighted from a car, the flies would descend like a black cloud, and the only means of protection – until one could light a fire on a hillside – was to don a coat in 35°C weather and cover as much of the body as possible.

Shamanism was prevalent in this area, and the word itself may be linked to the Evenki language (it could also be Tungusic or old Turkic). We would frequently encounter Shamanic symbols such as ribbons tied around trees and there was a strong belief among many of the people we encountered of the shaman's ability to contact the spirit world. Both Aita and her close friend Rita seemed to adhere to several spiritual beliefs. When Yulia and I were invited to Rita's apartment for dinner, we encountered a portrait in the bathroom of a saintly looking figure, rather like the Western depictions of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, she told Yulia, with her blonde hair, that she was a descendant of an ancient tribal goddess. They also had a ritual that was something like a séance, which they performed after the meal.

Aileen eventually left us and started another research trip to western Siberia. Yulia and I decided while out walking one day by the harbor, to see if there were any boats that sailed down the Lena, an alternative to our aborted environmental exploration trip. It was a spontaneous decision and we made it before realizing that we had hardly any rubles in our pockets. We just had enough for a round-trip to an island on the small steamer. The boat was packed, mainly it seemed initially with Russians of the "new Russian" variety – men wearing leather jackets with shaved heads, women made up and attractive – and mostly drinking very large bottles of beer.

Once we arrived at the island, the weather deteriorated. It was a disappointment. The Russians had set up a discotheque with loud music and were dancing. There were outlets selling alcohol. We decided to explore a little but the ground was too swampy to go far. Then it began to rain. The only option it seemed was to return to the boat. Many others had the same opinion. The same group of Russians was still around us, but Sakha were more in evidence. There were some angry exchanges. Some were now drinking vodka and the general atmosphere was quite menacing. An enormous man adorned in a thin white t-shirt pushed the boat away from the shore. The t-shirt bore the improbable slogan "Edmonton Welcomes the World!" It could only have originated from the World University Games, held in Edmonton in 1983. A radio was playing a song by the Russian techno-band Ruki Vverkh called "Koshka Moya" over and over again, until I could memorize the lyrics.

As the boat slowly returned to the port of Yakutsk, fights broke out aboard.

Yulia and I were alone in a four-seating area and suddenly there were Sakha all around us. She was utterly fearless, and likely because we were conversing in English, they did not bother us. I assumed they had mistaken us for Russians. More Russians then arrived and several attacked an older Sakha man, knocking him down. It was ugly. Once we arrived, we could see from the deck that a large gang – it seemed to be all made up of Sakha men – was awaiting the ship's arrival. A mass brawl ensued. We learned later that such skirmishes occurred on every sailing. It was simply crude ethnic violence, racism at its starkest, but probably the two groups were of similar size so it was not a matter of basic persecution of one group by another.

Aita arranged a stay in a local village some distance down the Lena for Yulia and myself, with a local Sakha family, who fed us borscht from a single pot, into which everyone dipped a spoon. We were later taken for a horse ride, the first ever in my experience. There was no inside washroom so at night we had to find our way through the black forest to the primitive toilet.

After Aileen departed, I became the chief cook, since Yulia could not make anything other than pancakes. I spent an inordinate amount of time at the market looking for goods and arguing over prices. Preparing them was also difficult since all water had to be boiled before use, and we only had two hot plates on the stove. Sometimes John, the Englishman from the next building, would join us, usually bringing a bottle of white Moldovan wine, which was the only wine available in the stores – beer was more plentiful. We would watch the noon news from Moscow at 6 pm. Yeltsin had fired another Prime Minister, Sergey Kiriyenko, and brought back Viktor Chernomyrdin as Acting Prime Minister. The general chaos in Moscow seemed very distant from our world in eastern Siberia.

Toward the end of the visit, we carried out some very good and useful interviews. Whereas Aileen was conducting interviews amongst the small peoples of the north, I had at least assisted her by attaining a clear picture of official views of industrial development and its impact on indigenous communities. We also visited a diamond factory. I learned subsequently that between 1974 and 1987 Soviet authorities had carried out twelve underground nuclear explosions in Sakha, aimed at improving conditions for diamond extraction. One of the tests took place only 2.5 kilometers from Udachny, the main center for diamond mining. I did not find any information on the impact of such tests, which were conducted under the auspices of the USSR Ministry of Geology. The industry in 1997–98 was in crisis because of a dispute between the Russian Federation and the De Beers company, which had control over the sale of about 70% of the world's diamonds. Sales began again roughly at the time of our arrival in Yakutsk. Prior to that, Sakha was losing about 70% of its projected annual income.

Aita was thinking of the future and suggested that once the project was over we should begin another one, on the possibility of bringing clean water to the city of Yakutsk. But the field was so far from my own that I could only be noncommittal. I could not become an overnight expert on the Russian Far East and its indigenous communities though I could perceive the appeal of such topics.

Though the trip was approaching its end, there was more drama ahead. Aita, Yulia, and myself arrived in good time at Yakutsk Airport for the flight to Moscow. But there was an unusually large crowd and we learned that the previous day's flight to Moscow had been cancelled, and all the passengers had returned with the clear intention of getting on ours. Moreover, it was a Friday, and the last Moscow flight before Monday. The crowd swelled so much that we could barely hold on to our suitcases. Aita, who is tiny, disappeared, re-emerging miraculously about 15 minutes later with two boarding passes in her hand. We found our way to the departure gate, slid through, and the door banged behind us with hands clawing at the window. It was like the last plane out of Saigon.

In Moscow, the financial crisis had arrived. The most obvious manifestation was the exchange rate for dollars, which in a single day rose from six rubles per dollar to around 30. Still, it was a relief to be there after Yakutsk. Without any shame one of my first ports of call was Moscow's first McDonald's, a Canadian enterprise, where I ate my largest meal for some time. Yulia and I smoked cigars with cans of gin and tonic on the balcony of the Sviblovo Hotel before she went to the Belarus station for the long train journey back to Minsk.

I published some of the results of interviews and research in Yakutsk in the journal *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics* (1999), while Aileen added the conclusions from her interviews with Sakha in the Vilyuy River region in *Central Eurasian Studies Review* (2002). She remained fascinated with the north and subsequently became Director of the Barents Institute in Arctic Norway. Perhaps the most complete answer to the question we were studying came from Susan A. Crate, who noted how environmental activism, embodied in the Vilyuy Committee NGO, was usurped by bureaucrats pursuing industrial development. The communities were effectively "bought off" and linked to the same business interests of the diamond industry. Crate's book entitled *Cows, Kin, and Globalization: An Ethnography of Sustainability* (2006) is an outstanding and definitive study of the people of the Vilyuy River region.

I retained contact with Aita and Raisa, and Aileen and I invited them to Canada the following year. We met in Jasper, Alberta, a halfway point

between Edmonton and Prince George, where Aileen was based, amid beautiful mountain scenery. Retrospectively, I think the project was moderately successful, but we struggled with the reticence of Sakha government leaders to acknowledge any problems among the village communities. Some even maintained that illness levels were higher in some non-industrial regions of Russia than in the diamond mining zone. The structure of the ruling elite and government priorities to a large degree determined future directions in Russian industry in the late 1990s. Perhaps the major difference between 2020 and 1998 is that central government control over the regions and macro decision-making have become stronger. In 1998, the Sakha enjoyed a brief period when their opinion mattered, and the fate of the small peoples of the north is more perilous today than it was then.

12

Moscow and Cambridge

Though I was focusing my research on Ukraine and Belarus, I never lost track of Russia. My mandate at the University of Alberta was to teach 20th century Russian history, which I did with a regular course and a seminar. My first PhD students all examined the same subject in different areas: David F. Duke studied the Russian environment, completing a PhD in 1998; Aileen Espiritu, discussed above, examined indigenous groups in western Siberia, graduating the following year; and Elena Krevsky's area of interest was the Silver Age in Russian literature. She completed her thesis in 2000. I was frequently in Moscow, at conferences or as a stopover to other cities. For a time, I pondered the idea of a project in Tatarstan using Kazan as a base and visited the university there to ascertain interest in another project. Ultimately, I did not pursue it because other plans took precedence.

I began to conceive of a general text on Russia, in which I could interject some ideas and new analysis, especially on the Second World War period. An editor from Pearson Education encouraged me to sign a contract and promised an advance. At the same time, I worked on a shorter project for Longman's Seminar Studies series, which focused on the Russian Revolution. The book appeared in 2000 under the title *Lenin's Revolution: Russia 1917–1921*, and sold very well worldwide but especially in the United Kingdom. The major project, which was much lengthier, appeared two years later as *Motherland: Russia in the Twentieth Century* in a bright red cover. It was also translated into Polish and republished by Ossolineum Publishers in Wroclaw as *Historia ZSRR* and featured in bookstores in Warsaw and other cities.

In October 2002, I was with a friend at a Moscow theatre watching an avant garde experimental play. Just a week later, about 50 armed Chechens seized the nearby Dubrovka theatre taking over 800 hostages in a standoff that ended when Russian security forces piped gas into the theatre. All the Chechens were killed but so were 170 theatre-goers. It was a sign of the terrorist threats still posed to Russia as a result of its brutal war in Chechnya.

The gangsterism and chaos that characterized Moscow in the 1990s had ended but the new order brought more authority to the leadership and to the security forces. In turn, the attempts at resistance became more desperate and the general public was endangered.

In 2004, I published another book with Longman entitled *The Collapse of the Soviet Union 1985–1991*, which allowed me to advance some thoughts on a complex question that intrigued both scholars and my own students. It seemed to me that many Western sources exaggerated the impact of the arms race and Cold War in the demise of the USSR. For the final three years of its existence, the United States was trying as hard as any power to ensure stability and the survival of the Gorbachev regime. Further, the economic crisis, which was seen by many analysts as a decisive factor, was not as acute as the one I had witnessed in Russia in 1998. Yet the government had survived. My line was that the nationalities question and Glasnost were the decisive issues. The latter permitted national revival that allowed debates over questions defunct since the 1920s. Old animosities came to the fore, such as the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, and the Baltic States were allowed to lead the way to a new era, when old national flags and symbols could be resurrected, state languages restored, and independence soon on the horizon as a possibility. Gorbachev's policies created these conditions though he had no intention of dissolving the Union. And ultimately the clash between the Soviet Union and Russia, under the presidency of Yeltsin from June 1991, proved decisive.

In the year 2001, I was invited to speak at Cambridge to a Ukrainian Studies group formed by a PhD student, Alex Orlov from Kyiv. Most of the people I encountered in this initial visit were studying the sciences but they were anxious to have some focus on their native country. I had visited Cambridge frequently as a child because my family had relatives there, and I was happy to offer a talk on "Ukrainian Politics and the Future of the Kuchma Regime." Alex wanted more, however, and we had some discussions about how there could be a stronger focus on the country at Britain's leading university. Others such as Olesya Khromeychuk, who was working for a Ukrainian radio station based in London, and Cambridge students Zoryana Oliynyk, Andriy Nevidomsky, Andriy Ivanchenko, and Oksana Trushkevych also joined us in one of the nearby pubs.

The following year, I discussed the idea of an annual lecture on Ukraine at Cambridge, both with Zenon Kohut the CIUS Director, and with the Committee for Russian and East European Studies professors at Cambridge such as Simon Franklin, Hubertus Jahn, Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, and David Lane. Zenon agreed to my request to use a small sum from a section I

operated freelance at CIUS called the Stasiuk Program for the Study of Contemporary Ukraine. We would advance the sum of $3,000 directly from Edmonton, which would be sufficient to get the series started. The longevity of the series would be dependent on its initial success. I suggested Roman Szporluk, the Mykhailo Hrushevsky Chair of Ukrainian Studies at Harvard University, as the first speaker. He was well known, a brilliant and witty lecturer, and likely to attract a good audience.

The first lecture took place in February 2003, with about 70 people in attendance at the large lecture theatre in Robinson College. The lecture, entitled "'Tabula Russia' or a Nation in its Own Right," cited a 1948 lecture by Lewis Namier on the centenary of the 1848 revolutions in Europe, which called for recognition of the "Ukrainian factor." Namier was born in the Ternopil region of Ukraine and concerned about the lack of recognition for Ukraine in his adopted country. The same sentiment was expressed by Simon Franklin. Ukrainian Studies was invisible at Cambridge. Three officials from the Ukrainian Embassy attended, and the talk was followed by a formal dinner at Emmanuel College hosted by Franklin. Several others had travelled from London.

With this successful beginning, Franklin, Jahn, Lane, and myself prepared for the following year. We had decided to alternate the speakers between Ukraine and the West, so after Szporluk, we asked the Ukrainian historian Yaroslav Hrytsak to deliver the 2004 version, followed by Dominique Arel of the University of Ottawa in 2005, and the Chernobyl scholar and author Alla Yaroshinskaya in 2006 for the 20th anniversary of the accident. The audiences varied between 70 and 100, which filled the Robinson Auditorium. The lectures were always followed by a wine and cheese social, and then a banquet in one of the Cambridge colleges for a smaller group of guests. Usually I requested that the lectures be timed to coincide with the February Reading Week at the University of Alberta in order to be able to attend.

Two years later a Ukrainian Studies program was launched at Cambridge on an experimental basis for two years. But it took place in controversial circumstances as Cambridge accepted a donation of more than 5 million pounds from the Ukrainian tycoon Dmytro Firtash, a controversial figure best known for his company RosUkrEnergo, which siphoned funds from Russian oil sales to Ukraine as an intermediary and in early 2020 was facing extradition to the United States for racketeering and money laundering. The acceptance of the gift from Firtash by Cambridge came under criticism both within the university and without. A group within the university thought that the contributor should have been better vetted, while analyst Taras Kuzio furiously denounced it in a number of articles published in the media.

Kuzio in 2008 was an outspoken supporter of Firtash's main political opponent Yulia Tymoshenko. Firtash allegedly played a role in her arrest by the Yanukovych presidency in 2011. He was also linked with Paul Manafort, the now disgraced former campaign director of US President Donald J. Trump, and believed to be financing several political leaders in Ukraine, including two former presidents Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovych. The donation thus overshadowed the success of the original plan to create a Ukrainian program at Cambridge, and the selection of Rory Finnin, an enterprising American scholar of Ukrainian literature, as the inaugural director. In 2013, when I delivered a talk on Belarus in Cambridge's Slavonic Studies series, followed by a dinner at Emmanuel College, Franklin proposed a toast to Firtash for his contributions to Cambridge. That was one occasion on which my glass was not emptied.

Still, the program, under Finnin's guidance from 2008 to 2018, has been enormously successful, and Cambridge now has the largest Ukrainian studies program in western Europe, something that I could only have dreamed of when commencing my PhD program at Sheffield. By 2018, according to a report in *The Ukrainian Weekly* (November 1, 2018), it had trained more than 300 students at undergraduate and graduate levels, and held over 100 public events. In that year, Rory Finnin took a sabbatical leave and was succeeded by Olenka Pevny, a specialist in early modern Slavic culture and history, formerly of the University of Richmond. The Firtash connection will begin to look more worrisome if he is convicted of the charges against him. At the time of writing he was still in Austria, and had not resided in Ukraine since the Maidan uprising of 2014.

13

Heroes and Villains

I spent more time in Ukraine in the early years of the 21st century, particularly areas of the east and south. In 2002, I applied for a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for a project on "The Formation of National History in Ukraine, 1998–2005," which was successful. It stemmed from curiosity about the different attitudes to the past in the diverse regions. In 2002, I spent time in Donetsk, the twin city of Sheffield, as well as Horlivka, and Yalta in Crimea. Not only were these cities Russian speaking, they were so different from the areas with which I was more familiar, such as Lviv and Kyiv, that they represented an almost alien world. In Donetsk, center of the coal-mining field of the Donbas, my visit coincided with the "Day of the Coal Miner" and I was back in the Soviet Union, listening to patriotic songs, many from the war years.

Crimea, with its hills and castles, and glorious Black Sea coastline was invigorating. I thought it peculiarly appropriate that one of the best statues I had seen of Lenin stood opposite the busy McDonald's. Russian businessmen were omnipresent, and the beaches swarming with human bodies, many without clothing. The Black Sea, incongruously, was teeming with dead jellyfish. The Massandra winery was producing sweet Crimean wine, almost orange in color, and Livadia and Voronsky Palaces brought back memories of the Second World War. At Livadia, one could buy leaflets describing how the Western Allies had betrayed the Soviet Union and, within, one could peruse Nicholas II's simple letters to his wife Aleksandra.

Was this Ukraine? Sevastopol, the most militaristic city I had ever visited, was adorned with monuments to the Crimean and Second World War, the Russian flag flying aloft from many buildings. In 1997, Russia and Ukraine had divided up the Black Fleet in a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, that permitted the Russians 83% of the ships and the lease of two large bays in Sevastopol. Russian sailors were omnipresent. The "Great Patriotic War" had long been the symbol of the might of the Soviet Union and seemingly it had never fully ended. The memory of the war was once again being revived by the new

Russian president Vladimir Putin as well as by Aliaksandr Lukashenka in Belarus.

In western Ukraine, however, the memory was very different. In particular, discussions had begun to emerge about the OUN and UPA, which were anti-Soviet and had collaborated at different times with the German occupation forces. It had been forbidden territory in the Soviet period – all were considered traitors or Banderites, after the name of Stepan Bandera (1909–1959), leader of the most militant wing of the OUN from 1940. The Ukrainian scholarly world was engaged in lengthy discussions about these events, including in 2003, the 60th anniversary of the OUN massacre of over 60,000 Poles in villages of Volhynia.

In Edmonton, Toronto, and Detroit, three places in which I had spent much time with the Ukrainian community on speaking engagements, there was little debate about the heroism and valor of OUN and UPA. It was taken for granted. Bandera and UPA leader Roman Shukhevych were widely revered. In Detroit, I had been taken to visit a former UPA fighter, and in Hamilton, Ontario, Professor Peter J. Potichnyj of McMaster University had allowed me to peruse his private collection of UPA documents. Potichnyj had been one of the youngest recruits to UPA at the age of 15 or 16. OUN and UPA had been part of my PhD thesis, though not central; rather they were the opponents of collectivization, burning down farms and assassinating Soviet officials in the protracted guerrilla warfare that ended around 1950, when Shukhevych was ambushed and killed.

Memories were perpetuated long after the first Second World War immigrants landed in Canada, the United States, and Europe, in churches, Plast camps, and other gatherings. Ukrainians had been persecuted, first by the Poles, and then much more harshly by the Soviets. In 1941 came German occupation, and in the diaspora narrative OUN and UPA had fought an unequal war against both totalitarian powers that ended in massacres and deportations. Now, similar views were beginning to permeate Ukraine. Politically, right-wing nationalism had little support, and the various far-right movements rarely attained many seats in the Ukrainian Parliament. Ukrainian presidents, too, were usually centrist in their political orientation. Still, Bandera and Shukhevych could elicit both positive and negative emotions in different regions of the country.

I spent the summer of 2003 in the city of Kharkiv, renting an apartment close to Shevchenko Park and studying at the V.N. Karazin National University. A former resident of the city, Anna Yastrzhembska, whom I had met when giving a lecture at CEU in Budapest, was on hand to show me around and introduce

me to some local scholars. She also advised me, wisely, to introduce myself to the Rector with chocolates and flowers, a Soviet tradition that still seemed to work well. Through Anna, I met historian Zhenya (Eugene) Medresh, who had been her teacher, and Mikhail Minakov, an astute and perceptive political commentator.

The city had a very good bookstore and while perusing its contents, I picked out a book on the famine of 1932–1933, published by an organization called MAUP (Interregional Academy of Personnel Management), a private higher educational institute founded in 1989, and described by the US State Department in 2008 as "one of the most persistent anti-Semitic institutions in Eastern Europe." Among its alumni was David Duke, the former Grand Wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, based in Louisiana. The book contained a chapter by Levko Lukyanenko (1928–2018), a former Ukrainian political prisoner, leader of the Ukrainian Republican Party, and the first Ukrainian Ambassador to Canada in 1992–1993. He was a member of Parliament at this time and had received an honorary doctorate from the University of Alberta in the summer of 2002.

The chapter was less an article than a diatribe. It provided a list of people who reportedly were responsible for the famine in Ukraine, and after each one was the word "Jew." The list even included Stalin and Lenin. The essence of the article was that Bolshevik Jews were responsible for the famine and for the occupation of Ukraine in the Soviet period. I was a frequent contributor to the daily newspaper in my hometown, the *Edmonton Journal*, and duly penned an article about Lukyanenko's chapter and its anti-Semitism. I felt obligated to do so but without doubt it was the first time I had written something that incensed the Ukrainian community, for whom Lukyanenko would always be a national hero, just like Bandera and Shukhevych. At the time, however, it was an isolated editorial, I was not mounting a campaign.

The following summer (2004) I was asked to lead a group of University of Alberta Alumni to Ukraine. It was a difficult task as the group, consisting mainly of people in their 70s, had their own goals such as wanting to visit their ancestral homes. One woman was always dissatisfied with the local entertainment offered at the hotel, demanding that the vocal group should stop singing and go home. But it was an interesting period with presidential elections scheduled for later in the year. We began in Mukachevo in Transcarpathia where some informal groups such as the youth group Pora were already setting up a tent camp following the April 2004 election for mayor when a successful candidate of the Ukraine Without Kuchma movement was attacked by thugs operating on the orders of local authorities. Subsequently we stayed in Lviv, Kyiv, and Yalta – the latter city had been added at my request.

Later in the year, when the crisis that became known as the Orange Revolution began in Ukraine, CIUS held a number of panels in which I participated at the University of Alberta. Lawyer Dmytro Jacuta, linked to CIUS through a government-funded legal reform program in Ukraine, had spent time in the Maidan and returned with a report of events. At its peak the protests, which began when crowds protested against falsification of election results in favor of the pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovych, encompassed over one million people gathered in a very cold Kyiv in November.

The pro-Western candidate, Viktor Yushchenko, became a national hero to Ukrainians abroad as well as to more democratic elements within Ukraine. In Edmonton, local Ukrainians were at the Legislature chanting "Yu-shchen-ko!" The juxtaposition of the good Yushchenko and the bad Yanukovych struck me at the time as simplistic. But there were extenuating factors: the poisoning of Yushchenko by security forces; the interference of Putin in the election and overt support for Yanukovych in Moscow; Yanukovych's criminal past and convictions in his native Donbas; and not least the obvious problems with the vote count in the Donetsk region.

Though Yushchenko's presidency (2005–2010) is generally regarded as a failure, marred by the rift between the new president and his first Prime Minister, the meteoric Yulia Tymoshenko, as well as Yushchenko's constant absences from Kyiv, and his rapprochement with the forces he had ostensibly fought against such as former president Leonid Kuchma and even Yanukovych, who returned improbably as Prime Minister despite cheating in 2004, it was notable for his radical moves in identity politics.

In the first place, in 2008 he followed an initiative of his predecessor Kuchma and enshrined the Famine of 1933 as a genocide and the defining event of Ukrainian identity. In some respects, this was a logical follow-up to the conferences and publications on the tragedy from Conquest onward. Mace himself was a forerunner. He moved to Kyiv in 1992 and wrote a regular column in *The Day* newspaper, which was bilingual, though Mace's editorials appeared in English. In one of them he urged Ukrainians to put a candle in their windows on the fourth Sunday of November in remembrance of Famine victims. Ukraine in his view was a "post-Genocidal society," the suffering passed in from generation to generation. This date was later used by President Kuchma for the annual commemoration of the Famine of 1933, which continues today.

Mace kept in contact after his move to Ukraine but was clearly having some difficulties. His messages often made no sense. In one he informed me that

he and John-Paul Himka were sitting on his balcony drinking Kahlua, which forced me out of my office to see whether I really had seen my colleague in the hallway a few minutes earlier. Sure enough, he was there. So, Mace was drinking Kahlua with a mythical person. In 2004, he died at the age of 52. I visited his grave in the Baykova Cemetery the next time I was in Kyiv, just a few months later. Though the headstone was not yet completed, the grave was adorned with flowers. It was located alongside that of Slava Stetsko, the wife of Yaroslav, who had declared Ukrainian independence in Lviv after the Nazi invasion of June 1941. Slava was also Chair of the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists and died about a year before Mace at the age of 82. I think Mace would have been quite content with her as a neighbor.

Yushchenko went on an international tour in 2008 to persuade international governments to support the claim that the Holodomor was genocide. The mission was reasonable but not totally successful: Canada voted unanimously in favor after a passionate Yushchenko speech, whereas the UK, Spain, and others ignored his request. Arguably the vote was dependent on Ukrainian influence in a given country, and Ukrainians were a substantial group in Canada, with several MPs of Ukrainian heritage as well as a former Governor-General.

At this time, I published my most ambitious book to date: *Heroes and Villains: Creating National History in Contemporary Ukraine* with Central European University Press in Budapest. It attempted to lay out the scholarly debates in Ukraine on both the Famine and OUN/UPA – they were obviously related though the events took place in different regions of Ukraine. Only the last chapter offered my own analysis, meaning that if a reviewer read all but the final pages, they would not have known my views. At a talk at Stanford University in 2009, I was praised by a former OUN veteran for writing the definitive account of the organization and suspected that the reader had stopped well before the end.

My feeling in 2007–2008 was that the debates were significant and restrained. Had such matters been left to historians then life for Ukraine would have been simpler. But Yushchenko intended to introduce official narratives and commemorations and link historical memory to current politics, designating Russia and the Soviet Union as the perpetrator, “the other.” He founded the Institute of National Remembrance and opened the official National Museum “Memorial to Holodomor Victims” on the Pechersk Hills in 2006, ironically alongside obelisks commemorating the victory in the Second World War and not far from the official war memorial museum and giant Motherland statue.

The design of the entrance statue – a small girl holding a candle – was replicated in the city of Regina, close to the Saskatchewan legislature and is termed "Bitter memories of childhood." Behind the museum and overlooking the Dnipro River is a large candle. Within one can find "books of memory" from each region of Ukraine affected by the famine, with the names of victims listed. During my visits there was not much else within other than some posters of the main perpetrators, including one citing the inflated figure of 10 million famine victims in Ukraine, a statement Yushchenko repeated during his international visits. The questions historians had raised in debates in earlier years, including in journals such as *Europe-Asia Studies*, were largely ignored.

Roman Serbyn, a retired professor from the University of Quebec at Montreal, once held up two large signs at a conference in Toronto. One said "Famine" and the other "Genocide." He would flash them frequently like political slogans during his talk, which was to a Ukrainian community audience, without the slightest pretense of scholarly objectivity.

In the West, as in Ukraine, the Holodomor was now not only the chief subject of commemorations and remembrance, it was the foundation stone of the modern state. The result, hardly surprisingly, was a simplification of its causes down to the single one that Stalin had intended to kill all Ukrainians by starvation. In this respect, Yushchenko, who was unceremoniously dumped out of office in 2010 and the most unpopular president to date, was unequivocally successful. He did not succeed in one quest: namely, to make it a criminal offense to deny that the Famine in Ukraine was a Genocide.

In Canada too, the study of the Holodomor took on a strong political hue – though it was to become much more intensive in future years. I attended a conference at the National University of Ireland in Maynooth, near Dublin, in November 2009, which compared the famines in Ireland in 1845 and Ukraine in 1933. Among the audience were Ukrainian experts on the famine, such as Stanislav Kulchytsky, and Ukrainian government representatives. The Irish contingent consisted mainly of scholars. Curiously while the Ukrainian side was 90% in favor of the genocide theory – Kulchytsky was reticent to use such a description – not a single Irish scholar believed that the British government had committed genocide in the potato famine of the 19th century. A book, based on the conference, edited by its organizer, Christian Noack, was published three years later.

In early 2010, Yushchenko went further, and declared Stepan Bandera, the controversial leader of the OUN, a "hero of Ukraine," having earlier allocated the same award to Roman Shukhevych, the leader of the UPA. The decision

caused considerable international consternation in Poland and other EU countries, as well as in Israel, which perceived and remembered Bandera as a collaborator with the Nazis, and the leader of an organization that carried out a massacre of thousands of Poles in Volhynia in 1943. The decision was to cause me personally many problems, which I could not have foreseen at the time.

The prequel, perhaps was the Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism signed on June 3, 1988 by a number of well-known European political leaders, including Vaclav Havel, President of the Czech Republic. It adopted a European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism, and a few years later added an educational project, on August 23, the date of the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in 1939. The equation of Stalinism and Nazism as twin evils, a form of Double Genocide, was contrary to Europe's former commemoration of the Jewish Holocaust as the single worst event in 20th century Europe that framed much of the thinking behind contemporary narratives on the war years and their aftermath.

These questions were compounded by Tim Snyder's book *Bloodlands: Between Stalin and Hitler*, published in 2010, which – unintentionally – provided indirect support for the "double genocide" theory from the geographical region encompassed by "bloodlands." Internationally, such interpretations, like those on the Holodomor, placed Russia on the "wrong side" of the historical narrative, countering the claims of the Putin leadership, as well as many Russian historians, that the Soviet Union had saved Europe from the "brown plague" of Nazism in 1941–45. This notion of the twin evils of Stalinism and Nazism was to become a prominent theme thereafter, and was deployed by some analysts on social media when discussing Ukraine's fate.

At the University of Alberta, there were several scholars who made their views known on the topic of Ukrainian nationalism and war criminality. They included John-Paul Himka, who had begun to study the Holocaust and its Ukrainian context, and was focusing specifically on the Lviv Pogrom of July 1941, as well as teaching courses on the Holocaust in the department. Himka had made several U-turns in his distinguished academic career, and for the later part of his career he focused on Ukrainian war crimes linked to the Holocaust and "its absence as a component of the identity consciousness of the Ukrainian diaspora." Though his research brought him deserved accolades at the academic level, it brought him nothing but opprobrium in the Ukrainian community. A fellow member of the choir at his Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Edmonton had even breathed the words "Judas!" at him during a service.

Two of Himka's doctoral students were also researching related topics: Kryzsztof Lada, a Polish student examining the Volhynia massacres and Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe, a man of German-Polish background, making a study of the life of Stepan Bandera. They were very different in personality: Lada always quiet and reticent, and Rossolinski-Liebe outspoken and even aggressive. He critiqued some of the things Himka and I had written in the 1980s in his book on Bandera, while conceding, more or less, that we had not known any better since we had no access to former Soviet archives. He would also walk unannounced into my CIUS office and offer comments on the topic of Bandera and the OUN. In 1983, I had written, with Myroslav Yurkevich, a somewhat weak defense of suspected war criminals following the announcement of the Deschenes Commission that there were none living in Canada. Neither Lada nor Rossolinski-Liebe completed their PhDs in Alberta: the former moved to Australia and the latter to Hamburg, Germany.

I had a PhD student of my own, Per Anders Rudling, who was fervently interested in these topics though his thesis concerned Belarus in the 1920s. Per, a Swedish-born American citizen who came to Alberta in 2003, had a wide variety of interests, but Ukrainian nationalism was perhaps his most frequent topic of conversation in social environments. He was probably the most prominent Edmonton-based critic of the OUN (Bandera) movement during the period he was working on his thesis, though it was in the period after he moved to Sweden that he made most headlines. He was the one who uncovered a former collaborator responsible for deaths in Belarus, living in Quebec, thus dispelling the myths of the Deschenes Commission. The UCC even wrote a letter to his university to try to have him dismissed, which led several scholars to write letters in his defense.

In 2009–2010, I was on sabbatical leave from the University of Alberta. My personal life was in some turmoil as I had separated from Lan at the start of 2010. It was a terrible decision to make but our lives had become quite separate, not least because of my peregrinations and constant activity. She became very involved in the Chinese community, and with the children now adults, was free to spend her time working on a variety of projects, including with new immigrants and with the Chinese Lions' Society. It is very hard to end a long-term relationship that has also produced two fine sons, but there are always many reasons behind such ruptures. I felt mainly responsible and still do. The brevity of this description should not detract from the enormity of the split.

I had a new partner, Aya Fujiwara, a Japanese former PhD student at the University of Alberta, who was to become my wife a few years later. I was spending the term at the University of Toronto, while living in Hamilton, about

an hour's journey by car down the 401 Highway. Aya had ended a job at the Embassy of Japan in Ottawa and taken up a Postdoctoral Fellowship at McMaster University in Hamilton. In January, I drove across Canada in a Jeep Wrangler to join her for the final six months of my sabbatical leave. The scope of the journey can be detected from my GPS, which informed me at Vegreville en route to Medicine Hat, Alberta, to be ready for a "slight right turn in 453 kilometers."

A month later, while working in Hamilton, I received a phone call from the *Edmonton Journal*, during which I was asked if I could write an editorial on Stepan Bandera, and his significance as a "hero of Ukraine." The newspaper had received an editorial – I believe, though it was never confirmed, that it was co-authored by Rossolinski-Liebe – but deemed it too extreme to publish, given the likely reaction of the many of Ukrainian origin living in the city. I agreed to the request. The subject was close to *Heroes and Villains* after all. But the result was not altogether satisfying.

I decided to ask Himka for help, knowing of his publications on the 1941 pogrom in Lviv, and he responded to my original draft that I had neglected to mention that Bandera's group had persecuted Jews in that city. I was hesitant, so he sent me some documents that he had used for his own research and they seemed to me conclusive. Still, I would maintain today that the editorial, published on February 7, 2010, was quite balanced, other than the headline the newspaper added, which I think was inflammatory: "Hero of Ukraine linked to Jewish Killings: honorary title sure to provoke divisions among Ukrainians today." The Ukrainian community evidently agreed with those sentiments: Daria Luciw, the President of the Alberta Provincial Council of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC-APC), declared that she was shocked by the editorial. I was able to amend the title in the *Journal*'s online edition, but the impact was clear.

Four days later the UCC-APC responded that it was stunned by the "inaccurate column and editor-assigned heading," which was reminiscent "of articles written in Alberta papers a century ago." It requested space to respond, as did numerous people, including Stefko Bandera, the Toronto-based grandson of Stepan, Marco Levytsky, editor of *Ukrainian News*, and Zenon Kohut, Director of CIUS. I believe there were dozens of other letters that never made it into print. The article received far more response than the one on the anti-Semitic ravings of Lukyanenko seven years earlier. Himka was already persona non grata in some Ukrainian community circles. Now I was to join him, at least for some time. In 1999, I had received the Shevchenko Gold Medal from the UCC at a ceremony in Winnipeg, nominated by Peter Savaryn. There were some calls for it to be revisited and possibly withdrawn, though they never came to fruition.

In Toronto, the Jacyk family wanted to commission a biography of the life of Petro Jacyk, the millionaire who funded programs at CIUS and the University of Toronto. I had been selected as the prospective author and had read through the thin and partially incomplete manuscript once already, thinking that it would be necessary to add a lot of background information. Following the reaction to my editorial, however, Nadia Jacyk, Petro's daughter, asked me to her office and politely informed me that I could no longer be responsible for her father's biography. The reaction in the community to my Edmonton editorial had been too negative. I was an outcast, it seemed. Still, I could at least offer talks at the University of Toronto, in contrast to Himka, who had recently been boycotted, with members of the Ukrainian student organization handing out leaflets requesting students not to attend his guest lecture. He was also disinvited from a major conference on another occasion.

Given my free time, I embarked on a lecture tour of Australia a few weeks later, which was to start in Perth, and continue through Adelaide (my official host university), Melbourne, and Sydney. In Perth, my host was the affable and brilliant Mark Edele, and in Adelaide, Paul Babyi, a law professor and a native of Calgary, Alberta. Paul had arranged a talk for me at the University of Adelaide on "The 2010 Presidential Elections in Ukraine," and added an evening function speaking to members of the Ukrainian community in the city. The university function went smoothly. In the evening I arrived at a packed room full of tables, with a much older audience – indeed everyone present seemed to be over 70 other than Paul and myself. In the background were portraits of OUN founder Evhen Konovalets, Shukhevych and Bandera, as well as a prominent one of Viktor Yushchenko, now ousted as President of Ukraine.

I kept my remarks strictly to the topic of the elections but once question time started, I could do little to keep the comments on topic. One man approached me with a piece of paper shouting "You wrote in *Edmonton Journal* on February 7 that Bandera killed Jews!" In fairness, the overall atmosphere was not hostile though I declined to answer any questions about the editorial. In Melbourne, I got more of the same, though my lecture at the University of Monash went well enough. By then I had been approached by Stefan Romaniw, the Vice-President of the World Congress of Ukrainians, who wanted to arrange a breakfast so that he and some colleagues could question me about Bandera. I had met Romaniw a year earlier at a conference in Adelaide, and though friendly, he had struck me as one of the more fanatical nationalists in the community.

After my talk, I spent the evening at the home of Professor Marko Pavlyshyn and his Ukrainian wife and we were enjoying conversation when my cell

phone rang. My sister Jill was calling from England with the news that our mother, then suffering from Alzheimer's, might not live much longer. Thus, I cut short my trip to fly to Singapore the next day, and then on to London to be with my mother during her final days. Living abroad for so long is always difficult as parents grow old, but mine had visited Canada frequently. My mother had become ill not long after my father's death from cancer in 2000, though she concealed it well for some time. My sisters and their families looked after her, almost in shift fashion, until the end of her life. She was an inspirational parent, and a woman of great kindness, combined with firmness. She recognized me as soon as I walked into her hospice room, but by then she could not really speak. She died with her family around her bedside, which seemed to me, then as now, an ideal way to end the human life.

Later in the same year, I was invited to contribute to a Ukrainian-language book on Bandera, edited by the German-Turkish scholar Tarik-Cyril Amar, and took the opportunity to moderate the language I had used in the editorial. It included many of the letter writers to the *Edmonton Journal*, thus allowing both sides of the debate to have a voice: Himka, Rossolinski-Liebe, Volodymyr Viatrovych, Alex Motyl, Yaroslav Hrytsak, and others. It was published in Kyiv under the title *Strasti za Banderoiu* (Passions about Bandera) in 2010, but never appeared in an English translation.

I returned to Australia in the spring of 2011 for a conference at the University of Western Australia in Perth. Afterward, I flew to Sydney to meet some friends, and took a taxi from the airport to the Holiday Inn in the St. Pancras area. As I went through the hotel door, carrying my suitcase, I was astounded at the reception. The entire staff was facing me and applauding as I entered. It was without doubt the most remarkable reception I had ever received. Before I reached the lobby desk, however, something prompted me to look behind me. And there with a large grin on his face and hair flowing was entrepreneur Sir Richard Branson. He hung around the lobby all evening, mostly on the phone, but was very sociable with all the guests.

The first decade of the 21st century was without doubt my most successful one in terms of accolades, largely thanks to the initiative of a brilliant department Chair, Robert W. Smith, a renowned scientist of the US space program and universally regarded as the leading expert on the Hubble telescope. Robert nominated me for the university's research prize in 2003, which I was awarded at a ceremony, with the Dean, Daniel Woolf, reading out my letter of nomination. In 2005, I received an Alberta Centennial Medal, for which one had to be nominated, though I was never sure who had nominated me. In 2006, with the support of Woolf, I was given the title of "Distinguished University Professor," which came with a permanent research salary of $20,000 per year, reducing my need to apply for external grants.

Some of these awards served as inducements for me to remain in Alberta, which politically was always too conservative for my political tastes though I loved the countryside, especially the Rockies, and the village feeling of Edmonton as a city. In 2008, I received the University of Alberta's highest award, the University Cup, for teaching, research, and public service, at a ceremony held at Edmonton's Jubilee Auditorium. I invited all my friends. My mother was too ill to attend, but my younger sister, Enid, came over for the event.

I had also joined the Canadian Army. Around 2000, Brian McKercher, a Professor from Royal Military College of Canada, visited several university departments trying to recruit people to teach courses at the Edmonton Garrison, both for officers and regular troops. I was persuaded to take part and for several years would drive north to the base and teach seminars and regular lectures on war-related topics. It was a very different atmosphere from my regular university classes. Some students knew far more than I about military technology but much less in terms of historical background.

The best class I ever taught was a seminar with a group of very talented and bright officers. The group included Wayne Eyre, then a Captain, but today a Lieutenant-General and Commander of the Canadian Army; Michelle Gallagher, a brilliant student, also at the rank of Captain, who eventually became a lawyer; Sean Bridgeman, a tank commander; Bryan Hamilton, an intelligence officer, who wore a lengthy grey coat and would always try to bait me in a friendly way, with comments about "pinkos" on campus; and Chris Chodan, a soft spoken but incredibly witty officer, who was Commanding Officer of the 6th Intelligence Company then based in Edmonton. After the classes ended, Chris nominated me for the position of Honorary Lieutenant-Colonel of his company, and after about a year, by 2004, I was awarded the position by the Minister of Defense, and continued until obliged to retire by longevity, in 2014.

I attended several field courses at the base in Winnipeg, which is adjacent to the International Airport, and countless ceremonies and dinners. I had a full uniform, and would often present medals to the ranks at the end of courses. Chris soon stepped down and was replaced by Greg Stead, formerly of the Canadian Navy, and he in turn was succeeded by Mark Godefroy. The preoccupation during the time I was there was service in Afghanistan and I would listen closely to their stories, many of which were far more hair-raising than I anticipated. I watched a video of long-range screening and destruction of an enemy truck carrying weapons, for example, shown to me by Corporal Ernie Kuffner, a gruff but kindly soul who died of heart failure shortly after I left the unit.

The hierarchical army system was something to which I probably never would have adjusted. One day a General visited our company, and when I entered the building with him, soldiers – mainly reservists – simply froze on sight so that the hallway was a sea of rigid statues, all saluting until he asked them to desist. He dressed down a Captain during a meeting for asking a direct question that was "well above his rank." And yet he was also a civilian, who worked part time at the airport handing out boarding passes at the check-in counter. While everyone below my rank addressed me as "sir," I found it difficult to speak to the General in the same fashion, though I was always respectful and not only to him.

14

Banned from Belarus

The climactic year 2010 would also be my last visit to Belarus for seven years, though I had no way of knowing at the time. I had received another SSHRC grant in 2009 for a study of the memorialization of the Second World War in the country. I anticipated at least three years of study, though I had visited many memorial sites over the recent years. In some ways it was a very obvious subject to pursue because the war is depicted everywhere in Belarus: every city, town, village, and recalled in some way, in memory or post-memory, by every resident. Thus, I returned to Minsk in the summer, following up earlier research trips of 2008 and 2009, when I had first become fascinated by the topic.

For my project I visited the Brest Hero Fortress and the Stalin Line Museum, both of which to some extent are based on historical myths. At the former, on the eastern side of the Bug River, the resistance to the German onslaught in late June and early July 1941 allegedly delayed the German advance. In reality the Nazis were already in Smolensk by the time the fortress fell. The Museum is elaborate and one begins at a tunnel under which one can hear the voice of Vyacheslav Molotov, denouncing the invasion in a speech of June 22, 1941.

The Stalin Line Museum was sponsored by Afghan War veterans, with government approval, in 2005. At its entrance is a bust of Stalin, usually adorned with wreaths left by admirers. The Stalin Line, as depicted there, halted the German advance to Moscow, giving the Soviet Army time to amass forces from the east to repel the assault. In reality, it had been disbanded before the German attack, as a result of the Soviet westward expansion into eastern Poland following the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939. I was allowed to fire guns used by both sides, but declined the opportunity to drive a tank, given that the outside temperature was around 35° C.

I heard a story that Lukashenka brought the late Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez to the Stalin Line, and the two of them watched an aerial battle

between a Luftwaffe plane and a counterpart from the Red Air Force. There was some firing, and the Luftwaffe plane went into a dizzying tailspin followed by an explosion as it disappeared behind a hill. Chavez gaped, looked at Lukashenka and asked:

"You killed that pilot just for me?"

The year 2010 was also an election year and one of the most interesting in the short history of independent Belarus. Ten independent candidates had been registered, some of which were fairly marginal, but a strong push had been mounted by Andrei Sannikau, the leader of European Belarus, and the poet Uladimizir Niakliaeu, former head of the Belarusian Writer's Union and now leading a group called Tell the Truth. The oppositionists had some external support from Poland and other EU countries, and Sannikau in particular was doing well in Internet polls. Lukashenka's share of the popular vote had declined to 31%, though that was well ahead of the rest of the field.

I was staying at the Hotel Minsk in the city center and spending most of my time in the National Library, in the far east of the city on the highway to the airport and to Moscow. During the visit, I met Aliaksandr Milinkevich for the first time, along with his assistant Ales Lahviniec, who had already run for office more than once, though without success. In 2006, Milinkevich had been the unified opposition candidate in the presidential elections, though the Belarusian Social Democratic Party had also advanced its own candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin, the former Rector of Belarusian State University. Milinkevich is a quiet-spoken academic from Hrodna, who would have been 63 years of age in 2010 and leads the Movement for Freedom. In 2006, his campaign was often compared to that of Yushchenko in Ukraine two years earlier, but he never mustered the same popular support. In 2007, he received the Knight of Freedom Award from Poland, which is often given to national presidents. In 2010, Milinkevich had opted not to repeat his quest for the presidency given the obstacles placed before candidates by the government.

I recall sitting on a bench in Independence Square on my last day in Minsk as storm clouds gathered symbolically overhead chatting with Sasha Solodukhina, then an American student but today a film producer. It was to be my last memory of Minsk for some time. The elections of December 2010 ended in a short but extremely violent confrontation between government OMON troops and protesters who believed the election results would be falsified. They had gathered initially in October Square, but it had proved impossible to hold an effective protest there. They then moved to Independence Square where the windows of the government house were

broken, the militia waded in, and over 700 were beaten and arrested, including seven of the ten presidential candidates. The EU promptly ended its ties with the government and sanctions followed.

Later, I asked Sannikau's campaign manager, Vlad Kobets, whom I met in Warsaw, why the protests had moved to Independence Square. His reply was very detailed, but worth repeating in full (the translation is mine):

> Actually, there was no single approved plan for the evening of December 19. There were options for action, depending on whether the authorities would allow people to gather at all. After all, an ice-skating rink was flooded on October Square, which in general made it difficult to stand on it. There were fears that provocateurs could take advantage of the situation and direct people, for example, in the direction of the Presidential Administration – this is a very short route, but the most dangerous, based on the possible consequences. For a long stay on the square, people need to be provided with hot drinks, access to toilets, as well as the opportunity to warm up. In those days, there were severe frosts and the activists of the headquarters purchased thermal underwear to stand in the cold for a long time. In 2001, *Zubr*[13] activists occupied the Palace of Trade Unions on the same square, but that was at the beginning of September 2006, when activists who supported Aliaksandar Milinkievič set up a tent camp. In December 2010, there was no talk about tents on the ice. One of the options was considered the Palace of the Republic, but this was not clearly foreseen by the plan.
>
> Independence Avenue is an ideal place to express a mass protest. The space from October Square to Independence Square, which eventually was completely filled with protesters, in length and width showed the true number of demonstrations – not 5,000 and not 10,000, but from 50,000 to 80,000 people. In addition, it is known from the experience of holding protests in Belarus that many join the demonstration only after being convinced that the march begins peacefully. The column usually grows at times. That's how it was in 2010.
>
> Various options were offered about where to send the column. One proposal was made to go to the railway station to ensure

[13] Zubr (Bison) was a civic youth organization strongly opposed to the Lukashenka regime and prominent during the period of colour revolutions in the early 21st century. It received financial backing from the United States.

the arrival of protesters from other cities. However, due to the fact that the new station building is a huge glass display case, and in the event of provocation, glass could cause numerous injuries and victims, this option was rejected. Decisions were made in the process displaying the candidates and their immediate environment – on the steps of the Palace of Trade Unions and further – the process of movement of the column.

The opposition did not plan any "power" scenarios; on the contrary, the main problem was considered the probability of provocations organized by the authorities in order to provoke a forceful crackdown. If there were conditions for holding a rally on October Square, then everything would probably have ended there. However, in addition to the skating rink and Christmas tree, authorities played loud music through the loudspeakers to create such conditions that it was extremely difficult to carry equipment to the Palace of Trade Unions.

The equipment of the "Tell the Truth" campaign was detained by the authorities along with the column that was attacked, and Niakliaeu himself was severely beaten. Right on the steps of the Palace of Trade Unions, a plan for a peaceful march towards Independence Square was agreed as the most logical and safest route – to lead people away from the rink, and not allow provocateurs to turn the convoy towards the Presidential Administration, and Independence Square is capable of accommodating a larger number of demonstrators and there are many exits from it.

The government house was chosen on the basis of the logic that Aliaksandr Lukashenka is not a legitimately elected head of state; moreover, after the election fraud he remains a usurper. Thus, the government was invited to begin negotiations.

The signs for a freer election than in the past had been promising, and even Russia seemed to be withholding its traditional support for Lukashenka – the Sannikau team even went to Moscow seeking support. But December 2010 marked a turning point, with seven candidates in prison cells on election night. The militia and KGB effectively destroyed the opposition, not only in the central square but during the following year when protesters could even be arrested for

> clapping, as a sign of dissent. Sannikau, like Pazniak and Sharetski before him, fled the country after his eventual release and now resides in the United Kingdom.

I opted not to try to return to Belarus during the election period or in 2011, which was a year of mass arrests, but applied for a visa the following spring (2012) and was turned down. I had applied through the Belarusian Embassy in Ottawa, which is a very small office, and I asked the official why I had been rejected. His email response was succinct:

"You will not be allowed to visit Belarus this summer. Best wishes, Igor." Later I learned that the authorities had compiled a blacklist of undesirables and I was on it. I didn't think for a moment that it was a result of my books, which could be found in the National Library, but rather as a result of shorter pieces I had penned, most often for the *Eurasian Daily Monitor*, published by the Jamestown Foundation in Washington, DC. I had written dozens of short pieces for this journal, usually of around 1,000 words, especially during election periods.

In 2012, I applied once again, this time through the Belarusian Embassy in the United States, but after a lengthy delay received another fancy stamp nearing the word *ADMOVLENO* (REJECTED) in my Canadian passport. It became a talking point among those on the blacklist, which included the German scholar Astrid Sahm among others. The following year, after a third rejection, once again from Ottawa, but now resorting to my British passport, I was close to giving up entering the country.

Thanks to previous visits, I had accumulated enough material, I thought, for my next book, and began the writing process in 2012 with the assistance of some of my graduate and honors students: Eduard Baidaus, Ernest Gyidel, and Antony Kalashnikov; as well as the Belarusian PhD candidate Veranika Laputska, who ensured that my transliteration met Belarusian standards. In terms of newspaper coverage of the memorialization of the war I was somewhat limited to those for which I could acquire a complete set online, since access to the National Library was now impossible.

In early 2013, the Jamestown Foundation organized a visit to Minsk, taking along some of its leading writers, and led by its president, Glen Howard. Though contributing as its main author on Belarus for the previous decade, I was neither invited nor informed. Thus, given my already precarious chances of re-entering the country, I was shocked to learn that the group had met with Belarusian leaders and handed over to Lukashenka a batch of published articles, including 21 of mine, approximately 50% of the publication that was

later published the same month under the title *Straddling Russia and Europe: A Compendium of Recent Jamestown Analysis on Belarus*. Many of them were quite critical of the government and I thought may have influenced my subsequent visa rejections.

The group expressed the view that it was necessary for the West to begin a dialogue with the Belarusian regime rather than adopt the attitude of the EU Partnership Program of demanding that the authorities fulfil certain conditions – recognizing human rights, free elections, etc., ostensibly perceiving the republic as a potential bulwark against Russia. It was true that Russia and Belarus were having some differences though there was little possibility of the latter breaking ranks from Russian-led organizations as later events were to demonstrate. Most of all, I was very surprised that I had never been consulted, though in fairness the copyright on the articles belonged to the organization. I did not write for them again.

I published *'Our Glorious Past': Lukashenka's Belarus and the Great Patriotic War* in 2014, with Ibidem Verlag, a German publisher based in Stuttgart. In some ways it might have been a companion to *Heroes and Villains*, and reflected my preoccupation with historical memory and current politics. In the same year, I was serving as a judge in a journalism contest for the association Belarus in Focus, which held an award ceremony in Warsaw. The other judges were Danish journalist Michael Anderson and the late Belarusian analyst Pavel Sheremet, then based in Kyiv – he was killed by a car bomb in that city two years later. During the same week, I held a book launch at the headquarters of the Historical Association, close to the Hotel Bristol, and sponsored by the Embassy of Canada in Warsaw, members of which had also attended the awards ceremony. I was also interviewed on Belsat Television and local Warsaw radio stations.

Despite the travel ban, I felt largely satisfied with my studies on Belarus. I had been serving as President of the North American Association for Belarusian Studies, which had a strong social network presence despite the general paucity of numbers and in general I had found dealing with the Belarusian diaspora somewhat easier than its Ukrainian counterpart. I did learn, however, that divisions among them were just as common as for any other diaspora group. I spent some time supporting a youth group to encourage young Belarusians pursuing various career fields, which met in Vilnius in 2013. The GMF group headed by Demes also held a meeting in the same city that included former presidential candidate Ales Mikhalevich, with easily discernible KGB men from Belarus taking a close interest. One in particular would hang around the lobby of the Radisson Hotel every morning and evening. Like some in the opposition, Vilnius had become something of a refuge for me given the lack of access over the border.

One of my ports of call in Vilnius was European Humanities University (EHU), which had been struggling for some time with a search for a new Rector. I had been a regular speaker at EHU when it was based in Minsk in October Square before the authorities took control over the building and evicted them in 2004. In 2006, with aid from the EU and several other sources, it attained the status of university in Vilnius, and about 900 students were registered there, the vast majority from Belarus. I gave a public talk there with Stefan Eriksson, the former Swedish Ambassador to Belarus (2008–2012), and one of the initiators of the Eastern Partnership Program of 2009. Eriksson spoke in fluent Belarusian to the delight of the attendees. In 2012, Lukashenka had expelled him from Belarus because of his political activity and support for pro-democracy groups.

Thus, I was not alone. Paul Acton, a friend from Sheffield and fellow Sheffield United supporter, commented during one of my visits:

“I’ve been banned from a few pubs but never from an entire country.”

15

Maidan and Hokkaido

The Maidan uprising dates from the failure of the Vilnius Summit, at which Ukraine was to sign a Union Agreement with the European Union but it did not happen immediately. Protests in the central Maidan of Kyiv, which had started in November 2013 peaked in February 2014, with armed clashes in the square between demonstrators and Berkut police, resulting ultimately in the deaths of around 100 people – most from snipers firing from the rooftops of nearby buildings – and the removal of the president, Viktor Yanukovych.

Russian forces invaded Crimea at the end of March and annexed the peninsula after a rapidly held and far from democratic referendum. Fighting broke out in the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, while in the western regions, local governments were replaced by nationalist forces. The Russian government claimed that neo-Nazi forces had taken power in Kyiv and it was necessary to respond. It also maintained that the United States government was behind the uprising, a claim bolstered by the presence in the square of officials such as John McCain and Victoria Nuland, and an intercepted phone conversation between the latter and another US official, evidently outlining their preferences for the next Ukrainian government.

The reports from Ukraine made international headlines and the actions in Maidan were visible live on social media. Before long, it was hard to discern truth from fiction as these outlets became a sounding board not only for scholars and analysts of Ukraine, but also, cranks, and trolls of various kinds. Jeff Kochan, a Canadian scholar based in Konstanz, has referred to the emergence of agnotology, or the study of ignorance in recent years. “The goal is not to replace one set of facts with another, but to create a fog of doubt about what the facts are. The resulting spectacle is meant to paralyze public opinion and promote passivity.”[14]

[14] Jeff Kochan, “Manufactured Ignorance about the Ukrainian-Canadian Left,” *Canadian Dimension*, January 3, 2020, https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/manufactured-ignorance-about-the-ukrainian-canadian-left

On Facebook and Twitter, reports were so numerous and contradictory that its many readers became confused. It was easy for many Westerners to embrace the narrative that an authoritarian and even imperialist power, Russia, had invaded its democratic Western-leaning neighbor Ukraine with the intention of occupying all its territory. But such an interpretation was very simplistic and one-sided.

In late 2013, I found myself following live video coverage of the clash between protesters and black uniformed police with shields and batons on the Maidan in Kyiv on the night of November 30-December 1. The attack on the protesters only swelled the number of people on the square the following day. I was communicating on Facebook with a number of people in Kyiv, including Bill Risch, an American scholar from Georgia, who was conducting interviews, well aware of their future importance. CIUS held a number of impromptu workshops with participation by myself and others. I also gave the keynote address at a CIUS Conference on "Ukraine within Europe: Opportunities and Obstacles."

The conference included papers by local and international scholars, as well as former Ambassador to Ukraine Derek Fraser – my erstwhile colleague in Sofia in 1989 – with over 200 in attendance. In my speech I noted the corruption of the Yanukovych regime, but that Ukraine seemed more likely to join the EU under his regime than that of the openly pro-European Yushchenko. In the event, as we recall, Vladimir Putin approached Yanukovych with – what the latter perceived as – a better offer. In truth, the Association Agreement as laid out was quite harsh to Ukraine and posed the question of what would happen with Ukraine's outdated steel mills and coal mines and how they could compete with European rivals. We also discussed regional alignment and the role of elites, and the implications of the imprisonment of Yulia Tymoshenko and broached the likelihood of Russia fomenting unrest in Crimea "and other areas." I don't think anyone attending this conference could have been totally surprised by what happened four months later.

In the summer I had been accepted as a Visiting Scholar with the Slavic-Eurasian Research Center at Hokkaido University in Japan. Ironically, given future events, I understood that a previous fellow, Kuzio, had recommended me to the host institution. My time in Hokkaido University at the Slavic-Eurasian Research Center (SRC) was not my first visit to Japan. Far from it. I had been about eight times before, to various places in Honshu and to Okinawa. My wife Aya was born in Kobe where her parents and brother still live. So, I can say honestly that, following a series of communications with Osuga-San of the SRC, I had an idea what to expect when we arrived at

Chitose airport, via Tokyo, on June 1, after a very long journey from Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Sapporo is the capital and by far the largest city in Hokkaido. It is a bustling, busy city, interspersed with spacious parks and a central region, Odori, containing a pleasant green area, which is the site in the summer of a hospitable beer garden, under the shadow of the TV tower. Public transport is efficient, and it is also easy to get around, as thousands do, by bicycle, though cyclists (and I became one) use sidewalks rather than the roads, finding their way around pedestrians.

Aya and I opted to find our own residence, at an apartment overlooking Nakajima Park. It was a beautiful spot and we were on the seventh floor with views to Mount Moiwa in one direction and over the park in the other. The sunsets were extraordinary. Our apartment had two bedrooms, though only the main lounge adjoining the smaller bedroom was air conditioned. The University of Hokkaido is four stops on the subway from Nakajima Park so in the morning I had a pleasant walk by the lake initially and through the university grounds at the end. The SRC is housed in a complex of buildings overlooking some tennis courts. The easiest access for a newcomer is through the library, but eventually I found some short cuts. The staff was friendly and helpful.

My host, Koshino Go, who studies Belarusian and Russian literature, gave me a tour of the library and the SRC. I was provided with a large office on the fifth (the highest) floor, with a computer, sofa, coffee table, and several chairs as well as a main desk. The fifth floor housed both full-time faculty and visiting fellows. I got to know Tabata-Shin and his wife Tomoko – we have mutual friends in the United States – Mochizuki-Tetsuo, and fellow Canadian Thomas Lahusen from the University of Toronto, who was working on a documentary film about the northern Chinese city of Harbin.

The SRC director, Osamu Ieda, was an entertaining host, as was his wife Yuko, who hosted several social occasions that allowed Aya and I to meet the graduate students and junior professors. Most events took place directly in his office on the second floor. There we met a former director, an anthropologist who regaled us with stories about the Ainu on Hokkaido and southern Sakhalin Island (Russia) just to the north. He had made a study of Bronislaw Pilsudski (brother of Josef), who spent his time in exile studying the lifestyles of the Ainu (he lived in an Ainu village and married an Ainu woman), the aboriginal people of Japan, who eventually succumbed to Imperial Japanese expansion and occupation of the large northern island. The stories were similar to those I had heard in Yakutsk 16 years earlier.

If one visits Hokkaido University in the summer, one will note two distinct

features. First of all, there are the crows. These are not North American crows, but huge birds with vicious beaks. And they congregate in vast numbers. It is a sight that makes Alfred Hitchcock's old horror film *The Birds* pale by comparison. And they were nesting, which obviously made them hostile to intruders. Never in my life had I imagined that crows would attack humans, but they did, and frequently, dive bombing in pairs. Accessing the Center through the ground floor entrance became quite hazardous until the university authorities removed all the nests. The fearless crow army then reassembled by the tennis courts.

And that leads me to the second feature. Students gathered daily on the courts. They played some game that certainly resembled tennis. But it was more complicated. It involved sometimes six people at a time, along with cheerleading factions of both genders, who at times were leaping up and down like demented pogo dancers. The players also had a code of bellowing. It sounded like something between a ram and an angry bull, and the first bellow would be echoed by a chorus of others. These calls began from early morning until the time I left my office at night, often unaffected by torrential downpours of rain. Tabata apparently complained at one point but was informed that the bellowing was a student tradition and that he simply didn't comprehend the custom. Neither did I, frankly, but I learned to live with it.

We soon explored the fascinating city. Sapporo is a winter resort, but the summers are also interesting, with various activities: spectacular firework displays, jazz and folk concerts, shrine festivals, concerts in Nakajima Park, which houses an impressive concert hall, ramen restaurants and night clubs in Susukino, and of course cold beer under the sun, with the famous Japanese beers on offer: Sapporo, Asahi, and Kirin. We got summer passes for Mount Moiwa, and I went there three times in all, using the two cable cars to the summit and enjoying the wonderful views of the city, both at daytime and at night. Ieda and Yuko invited Aya and I to their house in Otaru, a short train ride to the west, on the Sea of Japan. We began at the fish market, with its extraordinary display of maguro, uni, and kani – we later enjoyed trying hakkaku.

While in Otaru, I accompanied Ieda and a group of students on an excursion, which started with Mount Tengu – another cable car ride – where there was a museum on the top. I had met Tengu in Kyoto, but here his legend seemed to be more elaborate and the museum contained a host of Tengus, all with the usual oversized snout, a sort of Japanese version of Pinnochio, though in Tengu's case a source of good fortune, if tales are to be believed. Together with the students I made a wish by stroking the nose of a Tengu sculpture outside the cable car building.

Incidentally the legendary Tengu supposedly comprised characteristics of both a human and a bird of prey, which might help to explain the crow phenomenon described above. The views over the Japan Sea were unforgettable. In the distance a ferry was transporting passengers south to Kyoto, a trip of some 30 hours according to Ieda. To the north and west lay Russia. I was able at last to take stock of my companions. Three were Japanese (including Morishita-San and Kanayama-San) and three were Chinese, along with Ieda and his daughter Ryoko. The Chinese spoke Japanese and a little English.

After the mountain we took buses around, visiting a replica of a herring factory some distance from the main town of Otaru, close to the aquarium and – after our last proposed tour, the building where delegates of Russia and Japan had met after the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–1905, turned out to be locked – somewhat bizarrely to the only mosque in Hokkaido, where we were greeted by two men originally from Pakistan. They supplied us with coke and 7-Up, which we drank on the carpet of the mosque, facing Mecca, while the daughter of the older man, who had been educated in the United States, explained the workings of the mosque.

In August, Aya and I rented a car and visited Lake Toya, an area of spectacular volcanic mountains and lakes just two hours away from Sapporo, eating some wonderful food at the Windsor Hotel, located on the top of a hill. We went to Neboribetsu with its fascinating onsens (hot springs) and bear park high up in the mountains, a surreal environment where bears stand on their hind legs and demand food, which visitors can purchase from a machine for 300 yen.

Both Aya and I benefited from the expertise of fellow scholars and the resources of the SRC. The university library houses an impressive collection of Slavic materials, and even for Ukraine, the area on which I was working, the resources were equal to those of my home university, meaning better than most libraries of North America. They took some finding at first, but the search proved worthwhile. A highlight for me was the monthly graduate seminar. Frequently, the topic of Ukraine and Maidan was touched upon, as this was my stated field of research during my time in Hokkaido.

In July, the SRC held a major symposium on 30 years of crisis in Eurasia, 1914–1945, with visiting scholars from US, Italy, Turkey, and other parts of Japan, including Mark Von Hagen, whom I had met several times in North America and the American scholar of Japanese ancestry, Toshihazu Hasegawa. It was an invigorating and intense two days, accompanied by field trips to the Ainu Museum and the Historical Village of Hokkaido (Kaitaku no

Mura), an open-air museum of buildings from various parts of Hokkaido representing the period (1868–1926). Our hosts, interpreting on the bus in entertaining versions of English, were Uyama-San and Chida-San from the SRC. Aya also presented a paper close to her current research interests, on Canada's response to Euromaidan in Ukraine, and the role of the Ukrainian community.

In general, having Aya with me made life incredibly simple. I was able to visit places and understand things that would have been incomprehensible had I come alone. She also fit in well with the SRC and its activities, attending symposia and joining in discussions. But more often she could be found in the plush Daimaru store close to campus. Working at the SRC is a one-time opportunity to get a project done in ideal surroundings and largely without interruption. Indeed, the professors are usually closeted in their officers, working like beavers until sunset.

The relatively short time I had at the SRC – essentially the summer – proved to be incredibly productive. I was able to finish a major article and numerous shorter ones, as well as complete most of the editing for the book on Euromaidan in Ukraine. I began researching the career of Igor Girkin (Strelkov) who had taken on the role of Minister of Defense in the breakaway regions of the Donbas, and was believed to be responsible for the downing of a Malaysia Airlines flight over the conflict area in July 2014. It was evident that he was contracted by Russian intelligence services, but equally clear that he had adopted an independent position, making his own decisions and applying ruthless measures to anyone who committed a transgression, such as theft. I wrote numerous articles for my blog site with the intention of combining them in a book at some point.

Following the events in Maidan from Hokkaido certainly allowed one the advantage of distance. It allowed me to focus on specific topics – the career of Girkin/Strelkov, for example – without being caught up in the emotion of events. The war taking place in Donbas seemed remote and was rarely featured in newspapers such as *The Japan Times*. Moreover, I seemed to be the only academic in the vicinity even remotely interested in Ukraine. Perhaps that is why I made such good progress, though I did follow the writings and reports of a number of friends and colleagues in various parts of Ukraine throughout the period.

I noted several differences between the work ethic in a Japanese university and in Canada. For one thing, the faculty members virtually lived in their offices. Some never seemed to go home. In my signed contract, I had agreed to be in my office between 8:30 am and 5 pm but had never taken that very

seriously. Other than the visits to the library, however, we were actually expected to be there. Lahusen, who was making a film about the history of Harbin, simply ignored that rule and left campus whenever he felt the need. The secretarial staff on the floor below all sat around one table, nine women and a boss – naturally a man – typing away on their machines. One told me that her wage was based on the time she logged on to her computer and the time she logged out. And they were watched all day by the male supervisor. She was horrified when I sent her a note to say I was visiting Lake Toya, and said she preferred not to know.

The city had beer gardens all summer, on the other hand, and the faculty invited me several times to the center and would extend their stay until late in the evening. Despite their industriousness, by Western standards, the faculty was not especially productive, but then only about three of them were tenured; the rest were on short contracts of up to five years. In terms of gender, the faculty resembled the secretarial pool. There was only one woman there, and she was the youngest faculty member. All of them could read and speak Russian, and in several cases, at least one of the Central Asian languages.

Once I returned to Alberta in August, I took on a new position, that of Chair of the Department of History and Classics for the next five years. I formally gave up my office at CIUS, which had been allocated because of my directorship of the Stasiuk Program for the Study of Contemporary Ukraine. In 2012, CIUS had been integrated into the Faculty of Arts, with a program review conducted subsequently resulting in a reduction of staff. Zenon Kohut had retired in 2012 and a new director was appointed, Volodymyr Kravchenko from Kharkiv, who had visited Alberta several times as a visiting scholar. Because of the integration, Kravchenko's home department was History and Classics. His arrival heralded a new era.

In September 2014, the most vicious fighting of the Ukrainian conflict took place in the Donbas when Russia sent in "volunteers," regular troops to counter the advance of the Ukrainian Army, operating under the mandate of an anti-terrorist operation (ATO). The increase in tensions manifested itself widely on social media. Many of my friends began to use the Ukrainian flag as their home page photograph on Facebook, and there was much focus on Russian president Putin who was compared to Hitler, with President Barack Obama and some other Western leaders depicted as appeasers, unable to withstand the aggressive stance of the Russian leader. I tried to maintain the distance from events I had acquired in Japan, while writing frequent commentaries, mainly for European-based journals.

In the meantime, several scholars contributed to the book I was preparing along with my PhD student Frederick Mills, entitled *Ukraine's Euromaidan*. In retrospect, it seems to me an optimistic and rather one-sided monograph, though it contains some articles of real value, especially by those who were witnesses to the events in Maidan. Contributors included Risch, Kuzio, Olesya Khromeychuk, Tanya Zaharchenko, Svitlana Krasynska, Marta Dyczok, Olga Onuch, and Aya Fujiwara, as well as young Ukrainian scholars Anna Susak and Natalia Otrishchenko, and my Belarusian friend Padhol, who co-authored a chapter with me on the reaction to Euromaidan in Belarus. When the book appeared in April 2015, the war in Donbas was still continuing, and Russia was suffering from Western sanctions as a result of its refusal to withdraw from Crimea.

In Canada prior to 2014, Prime Minister Stephen Harper closely allied his cause with that of the UCC. When new Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko, a well-known oligarch and longtime political operator, took office in June 2014, Harper flew to Kyiv for the ceremony along with UCC President Paul Grod. A photograph in the media showed them together on an airplane with Harper wearing a Ukraine soccer scarf. Harper, a right-wing conservative, announced his intention of building a monument in Ottawa to the victims of Communism. In the 2014 Canadian elections, however, his party was roundly defeated, and Justin Trudeau became Prime Minister as the leader of the Liberal Party. Essentially, Canadian policy did not change much: like most of the Western world, we were solidly behind Ukraine. That position was justifiable but there was much that remained unclear, including the significance of extremists, responsibility for the 100 murders in Maidan, and Ukraine's policies toward the population of the occupied regions.

16

Memory Laws

On March 25, 2014, Poroshenko appointed Volodymyr Viatrovych (born 1977) as head of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance (UINR). The institute itself had been founded by Yushchenko in 2007. Viatrovych earlier had directed a far-right Center for the Study of the Liberation Movement, based in Lviv, and he holds a Candidate of Sciences degree in history from Lviv University, where he worked on UPA raids beyond the Ukrainian borders, defended in 2004. In 2008–2010 he was director of the Archives of the Security Service of Ukraine. Viatrovych is deeply immersed in Ukrainian politics and a passionate nationalist, prepared to defend OUN and UPA from any accusations of past crimes. Himka and his PhD student Taras Kurylo had written a scathing review of one of his books about the attitude of the OUN to Jews in an issue of *Ukraina Moderna* in 2008.

In 2013, there had been an encounter with Viatrovych at Columbia University at a workshop organized by Tarik-Cyril Amar. Taras Kuzio, who evidently had turned down an invitation to attend but had shown up nonetheless, complained that the chair of a session had refused Viatrovych the right to speak and that the conference had not given equal weight to Russian nationalism, while critiquing its Ukrainian variant. Amar responded on my CIUS blog site, that Viatrovych had shown up uninvited and demanded the floor, and then started to read a lengthy speech in Ukrainian using a translator. The chair of the session had been obliged to cut him short after more than three minutes, having stressed earlier that all questions must be brief. Viatrovych had also recorded the session without asking permission.

The dispute illustrated a growing divide in Western scholarship on Ukraine, which was complex but can be simplified more or less as follows. On the one hand were scholars of Ukrainian background – though not only – who defended Ukraine and were given broad scope to disseminate their views at public forums run by community organizations. On the other was a group of Western critics and a few Ukrainian counterparts who believed that Ukraine should recognize that it was not always a historical victim, but had also been

responsible for some crimes. In the background, always, was the Second World War, but the time period reached back at least to the Famine of 1933, and sometimes to 1918 and earlier. In Ukraine, Viatrovych was to express more publicly his earlier research on "defenders of Ukraine in the 20th century."

Earlier, there had been online debates, which were very heated, on such issues as the Lontskyi Prison Museum in Lviv, headed by Ruslan Zabilyi, who was considered by Himka and others to be highlighting some crimes while concealing others, specifically those of OUN and its treatment of Jews. Per Rudling was also prominent in these discussions. After the Bandera debacle in 2010, his responses to Zenon Kohut, for example, resulted in the CIUS Director feeling ill as a result and refusing to read them. Another issue was the new Canadian Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg and the allocation of space for the Holodomor, specifically whether it was suitable given the enormity of the tragedy. One complaint was that the Holodomor exhibit was located too close to the public washrooms.

In November 2014, I took part in an event on "The Future of Ukraine: Conflict, Leadership, and Civil Society" at the University of San Diego (USD). The speakers were Taras Kuzio and myself, with Svitlana Krasynska, then completing her PhD at USD, as the main organizer. I had met Svitlana at a conference on Chernobyl at the University of Wisconsin-Madison eight years earlier and we had kept in contact. Yurii Risovanny, my friend from Chernobyl, had spoken at that conference and turned up at the opening reception in San Diego. I was very happy to see him again. Around the turn of the century, he had won a green card in the Kyiv lottery and could move to the US city of his choice. He chose San Diego, not a bad selection, and brought over his entire family.

Kuzio, as anticipated, lashed out at the Russian government and Putin in particular. I tried to be a bit more balanced but some in the audience clearly didn't like one of my slides, which described historical allegiances of the Ukrainian population and featured Bandera and Stalin together. A singular incident afterward encapsulated the time: someone asked for a photograph of the speakers and organizer together in front of the Ukrainian flag, and Kuzio immediately started a loud rendition of the popular ditty "Putin khuylo," believed to have originated with Kharkiv soccer supporters of the team FC Metalist after the Russian annexation of Crimea. The core of the word "khuylo," khuy (hui), simply means "dick," thus the simple translation is "Putin the dickhead." I felt very uncomfortable.

The issue was not so much the phrase but the venue and circumstances. The

phrase had gone viral on YouTube in the spring and was sung by soccer fans throughout Ukraine, as well as some in Belarus. Acting Foreign Minister and former University of Alberta graduate student, Andrii Deshchytsia, had approached a large crowd outside the Russian Embassy in June 2014 following the shooting down of a Ukrainian military plane by Donbas militants. When the crowd began to sing "Putin khuylo" he joined in with gusto, but his purpose in doing so was to prevent people from acts of violence. Some reports suggested that the fact that Poroshenko made him Ambassador to Poland rather than the full Foreign Minister after the presidential election were attributable to his actions, i.e. singing the song.

In the following month Ukraine's Internal Minister, Arsen Avakov, also attracted attention when he met the Kyiv Special Forces Battalion. The exchange began with the greetings now regularly used in Ukraine, based on the OUN-Bandera model:

"Glory to Ukraine!"

"To our heroes, glory!"

Avakov then shouted: "Putin!" The troops replied "Khuylo!" It is likely that this was the anticipated response.

It was Viatrovych, however, who attracted most venom from his detractors and support from his followers and who took the most political of stances. From my perspective, Viatrovych had two fundamental weaknesses. First, he was limited to the Ukrainian language since his English was non-existent, which would not have been a factor when in Ukraine, but hindered his impact abroad and restricted his audiences to those who understood Ukrainian. Second, he did not engage others by publishing in scholarly journals. His books were published by a company run by his wife and were also polemical in tone. Had he used peer-review journals, there would have been more chances to put his work in critical perspective. In his new position, however, he had considerable power, and he intended to use it.

Viatrovych was a frequent visitor to Canada, usually hosted by regional UCC organizations, which would then ask academic institutes to sponsor his talk. In the early tenure of Kravchenko at CIUS, we had a lengthy discussion with Frank Sysyn and others whether he should be invited to come to Edmonton for a lecture after offering one in Toronto. On this occasion, Kravchenko emphatically ended the discussion with a clenched fist on the table, noting that Viatrovych was a politician rather than a scholar: "He will NOT be coming to CIUS." But he showed up at many other venues.

In 2015, Viatrovych began a quest to de-communize Ukraine. Together with Yurii Shukhevych, son of Roman and a former political prisoner, he helped author four laws that were introduced into the Ukrainian Parliament and passed with little debate. The laws were: first, on condemning Communist and National Socialist regimes and prohibiting Communist and Nazi symbols – which signified the removal of Communist monuments and renaming towns and streets named after Communists; second, on the status and honoring of the memory of "fighters for the independence of Ukraine in the 20th century" (and recognizing inter alia OUN and UPA); third, on remembering the victory over Nazism in the Second World War; and fourth, on access to Communist Archives and placing them under the control of the UINR. Poroshenko gave his approval to the laws in mid-May 2015.

Of the four laws, two had immediate impact, namely the ban on Communist symbols, which soon resulted in a ban on the Communist Party, which had run in all the previous parliamentary elections and until 2014, had a significant number of deputies. Petro Symonenko, its long-time leader, had made the final round run-off for president in 1999 but was defeated by Leonid Kuchma. But in 2019, as a result of the Memory Laws, he was not permitted to run. Monuments were soon demolished – in fact the Lenins in Kyiv were already removed by the end of 2014, but those in other cities had not been touched. Ukraine had more Lenins per population than any other republic of the former Soviet Union, about 5,000 in total. The removal of Lenins seemed to me quite logical and natural: after all, what was Lenin to Ukraine?

It was the second law, however, Law 2538-1, that caused the most impact outside Ukraine because it seemed to restrict freedom of scholars to critique people and organizations such as OUN and UPA, since such criticism could be regarded as attacks on the "dignity" of such figures or entities justifying an arrest as a criminal offence. Before the law went into force, and together with 4-5 others, I wrote an Open Letter to Poroshenko and Prime Minister Volodymyr Hroysman appealing to them not to sign the draft into law. Several versions of the letter circulated between us with the final version a combined effort between British scholar James Sherr and myself. In the version that was published in the Ukrainian journal *Krytyka*, however, I was listed erroneously as the sole author.

A second aspect of this letter, which was to have many repercussions, was that initially it was restricted to the 5-6 scholars – mostly Canadian – because we thought this might be a more effective way to protest. The German scholar Andreas Umland, however, with whom I had cooperated on the Belarus and Euromaidan books – they were included as part of a series of which he was the main editor – dispersed the letter around Europe. Thus, the number of signatories increased to more than 70. The letter ran as follows:

To the President of Ukraine, Petro O. Poroshenko, and to the Chairman of Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada, Volodymyr B. Hroysman:

We, the undersigned, appeal to you not to sign into law the draft laws (no. 2538-1 and 2558) adopted by the Verkhovna Rada on April 9, 2015. As scholars and experts long committed to Ukraine's regeneration and freedom, we regard these laws with the deepest foreboding. Their content and spirit contradict one of the most fundamental political rights: the right to freedom of speech. Their adoption would raise serious questions about Ukraine's commitment to the principles of the Council of Europe and the OSCE, along with a number of treaties and solemn declarations adopted since Ukraine regained its independence in 1991. Their impact on Ukraine's image and reputation in Europe and North America would be profound. Not least of all, the laws would provide comfort and support to those who seek to enfeeble and divide Ukraine.

We also are troubled by the fact that the laws passed without serious debate, without dissenting votes and with large numbers of deputies declining to take part.

In particular we are concerned about the following:

1. Concerning the inclusion of groups such as the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) as "fighters for Ukrainian independence": Article 6 of this law makes it a criminal offense to deny the legitimacy of "the struggle for the independence of Ukraine in the 20th century" and public denial of the same is to be regarded as an insult to the memory of the fighters. Thus, questioning this claim, and implicitly questioning anything such groups did, is being made a criminal offense.

2. Law 2558, the ban on propaganda of "Communist and National Socialist Regimes" makes it a criminal offense to deny, "including in the media, the criminal character of the communist totalitarian regime of 1917–1991 in Ukraine."

The potential consequences of both these laws are disturbing. Not only would it be a crime to question the legitimacy of an organization (UPA) that slaughtered tens of thousands of

> Poles in one of the most heinous acts of ethnic cleansing in the history of Ukraine, but also it would exempt from criticism the OUN, one of the most extreme political groups in Western Ukraine between the wars, and one which collaborated with Nazi Germany at the outset of the Soviet invasion in 1941. It also took part in anti-Jewish pogroms in Ukraine and, in the case of the Melnyk faction, remained allied with the occupation regime throughout the war.
>
> However noble the intent, the wholesale condemnation of the entire Soviet period as one of occupation of Ukraine will have unjust and incongruous consequences. Anyone calling attention to the development of Ukrainian culture and language in the 1920s could find himself or herself condemned. The same applies to those who regard the Gorbachev period as a progressive period of change to the benefit of Ukrainian civil society, informal groups, and political parties, including the Movement for Perestroika (Rukh).
>
> Over the past 15 years, Vladimir Putin's Russia has invested enormous resources in the politicization of history. It would be ruinous if Ukraine went down the same road, however partially or tentatively. Any legal or 'administrative' distortion of history is an assault on the most basic purpose of scholarly inquiry: pursuit of truth. Any official attack on historical memory is unjust. Difficult and contentious issues must remain matters of debate. The 1.5 million Ukrainians who died fighting the Nazis in the Red Army are entitled to respect, as are those who fought the Red Army and NKVD. Those who regard victory over Nazi Germany as a pivotal historical event should neither feel intimidated nor excluded from the nation.
>
> Since 1991, Ukraine has been a tolerant and inclusive state, a state (in the words of the Constitution) for 'citizens of Ukraine of all nationalities'. If signed, the laws of April 9 will be a gift to those who wish to turn Ukraine against itself. They will alienate many Ukrainians who now find themselves under de facto occupation. They will divide and dishearten Ukraine's friends. In short, they will damage Ukraine's national security, and for this reason above all, we urge you to reject them.

Among the signatories were some of the most prominent names in Ukrainian studies: Dominique Arel, Omer Bartov, Serhii Yekelchyk, Sofia Dyak, Rory

Finnin, Frank Golczewski, Mark Von Hagen, Andreas Kappeler, Andreas Umland, Lucan Way, Zenon Wasyliw, and others. Not one of the above had written anything to suggest they were anything other than scholars of Ukraine and supportive of its progress as a democratic state. The list also included some who had been very critical of the OUN and UPA in the recent past, such as Himka, Rudling, Rossolinski-Liebe, and Jared McBride. Shukhevych instantly dubbed us all Kremlin agents and Viatrovych wrote an angry response on the pages of *Krytyka* condemning the letter and objecting to several signatories whom he claimed wrote articles on "primordial Ukrainian collaborationism" that were openly used by Russian propaganda agencies. If Poroshenko and Hroysman saw the letter, it made no impact on their decision. It did draw attention, nonetheless, to the defects of the law.

The issue was that we had stepped over a red line by criticizing a Ukrainian law at a time when the state was at war with Russia and struggling to retain its territories. The concept behind the letter, however, was to help, not to hinder Ukraine, and to ensure that its path to Europe was smoother by removing some obvious iniquities. We had no objection – and I can only imagine that all signatories were in approval – to the opening of the former KGB archives to all scholars. We were objecting to the ethics of a single law. Whether Russian agencies chose to use the letter in their propaganda was hardly our business. We were not writing for them.

In July, I spoke at the Kennan Institute in Washington, DC, along with Jared McBride, on the topic "Ukraine's Decommunization Laws: Legislating the Past?" My long-time friend Jurij Dobczansky was in the audience, but did not respond to my greetings. It seemed he now regarded me as an enemy. The audience consisted of Kennan staff and interns, graduate students from the Washington area, and a large contingent from the Ukrainian community. Afterward, Jurij approached me and we had a "discussion." He was genuinely angry and compared my remarks to those of Soviets about Ukrainian dissidents when we had first met in the late 1970s. I did not think then or now that is was a useful analogy.

I would not like to give the impression that hostile encounters were the only sorts of academic gatherings of 2014–2015. Olenka Bilash had acquired a grant from the Kule Institute of Advanced Studies for a "Research Initiative on Democratic Reform in Ukraine," which embraced the rule of law, post-secondary education, and nationality and language policies, and with participation from a number of Alberta-based scholars, including myself, and with Skype panels with scholars in Kharkiv and other locations. Kravchenko was also working closely with Kharkiv colleagues, many of whom came to Edmonton for talks and discussions. And as head of a very large department, I was very preoccupied with administrative matters and with meetings.

In September 2015, Aya organized a major conference on "70 Years After Hiroshima: Conceptualizing Nuclear Issues in Global Contexts," on which we both worked to acquire a major grant and to solicit speakers. In the background was the closure of the Fukushima nuclear plant following the March 2011 tsunami and we used our Hokkaido contacts and with others we had met in Japan to assemble a truly international cast of speakers. Aya was pregnant at the time, but was not expecting until November.

My department had organized some talks at local schools, and to all grades. On October 2, I found myself in the northern part of Edmonton giving a talk on the Ukraine conflict to Grade 3 students. Upon leaving, I thought that as the school was close to the cemetery that contained Nicole's grave, I would pay a visit, something I had not done regularly. I spent some time there imagining how she would have been in her 30th year when my cell phone rang. Aya's waters had broken six weeks prematurely. I drove home like Lewis Hamilton and took her to the Royal Alexandra Hospital. Later that night, she gave birth to our twins, Akiko and Kaella, who were both healthy, and this event overshadowed any academic pursuits and debates. I was a father again at 62, and this time, miraculously it seemed to me, had two healthy daughters, something I had not believed possible after the tragic death of Nicole. But I sensed the link between them. It was a rare occasion when I felt that a greater power was watching over us.

The following year, Chernobyl reappeared as a conference and media topic on the 30th anniversary of the accident. I gave talks at the University of Waterloo and at the Munk Center for Global Research, University of Toronto. Otherwise, my obsession was Ukraine's memory laws and decommunization, which I presented at several locations, perhaps most notably at the Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Uppsala University, Sweden. Though Belarus was in the background during this tempestuous period in Ukraine, I was an invited speaker at the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, US Department of State in July. I was a familiar face there, having been invited back every summer, usually to talk about Belarus, and sometimes alongside Grigory Ioffe, a professor of geography at Radford University and Moscow native, with whom I disagreed deeply on virtually everything to do with that country, but who is a friend on a personal level and a very witty and entertaining man.

17

CIUS: The Limitations of Academic Freedom

The Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies (CIUS) commemorated its 40th anniversary in 2016. A large sign was placed outside Pembina Hall, on the main University of Alberta campus where it was housed on the fourth floor that said simply: "CIUS – 40 Years of Excellence." There were a number of events over the year but the highlight was a conference on October 14 and 15 entitled: "Ukrainian Studies in Canada: Texts and Contexts." The day before the conference, Taras Kuzio, whom Kravchenko had appointed a Research Associate on a three-year contract, offered a talk on "Is Donbas part of Ukraine?" Kuzio was unhappy because his contract had not been renewed, partly as a result of his YouTube broadcasts, several of which targeted CIUS among his usual victims of scholars who in his view were hostile to Ukraine, "Putinophiles," or fellow travelers.

The Conference had a formidable array of scholars working on Ukraine throughout their scholarly careers. It included from Canada: Volodymyr Kravchenko, Paul Robert Magocsi, Serhii Yekelchyk, Bohdan Kordan, Manoly Lupul, Myroslav Shkandrij, Frank Sysyn, Zenon Kohut, Alla Nedashkivska, Heather Coleman, Natalia Khanenko-Friesen, Lubomyr Luciuk, and myself. In addition, there were Serhii Plokhy, a former CIUS Research Associate, the Hrushevsky Chair of Ukrainian History from Harvard, Marta Bohachevsky-Chomiak from Washington, DC, Rory Finnin from Cambridge, and Andrei Portnov from Berlin. Among community attendees were Peter Savaryn, one of the CIUS co-founders, businessman Andrii Hladshevsky, and Paul Grod, President of the UCC. Bishop Borys Gudziak, the prominent Ukrainian Catholic Church Archeparch from Philadelphia, gave the keynote address.

With heavy snow falling outside the windows, the 89-year old Lupul gave a passionate speech in which he lamented the lack of young scholars entering Ukrainian studies, and particularly non-existent at CIUS. Magocsi was

particularly animated, expressing his anger at the concept of public history and scholars who took on the role of public intellectuals. Kuzio was very supportive of him, and informed me in some detail of the isolation of Magocsi during the time of his appointment as Chair of Ukrainian Studies in Toronto. In a later autobiographical pamphlet he circulated in 2019, Magocsi explained how at that time (1980) the campaign seemed designed to allot the position to Frank Sysyn, rather than the eventual choice, Orest Subtelny. All his anger, therefore, had been misdirected. The episode seems to have stood the test of time since it is evidently far from forgotten four decades later and Subtelny has passed away. On the other hand, Magocsi, an American of Carpatho-Rusyn origins, is still the holder of the Chair after 40 years in the post.

The conference turned out to be the final public appearance in my presence of two leading lights of CIUS. Peter Savaryn died in April 2017 at the age of 90, having remained very active and spry into his later years. And Lupul died in July 2019 at the age of 91. Typically, Lupul had set out the entire program of his own funeral, which took the form of his favorite music (Mozart and Leonard Cohen were included), interspersed with tributes, and he had left a message for his son and daughter that variance from the theme laid out would require a "very good reason." I felt that his passing left a big hole, not only in the community but in my life too. This cantankerous but very likeable man had been my pathway to my life in Canada but perhaps his legacy had not been followed up fully by his successors who based on their own expertise took CIUS into the direction of historical topics rather than the broader fields Lupul had supported. I have no doubt that he remains a controversial figure in some parts of the community.

In 2017, CIUS was seeking a new Director. After a five-year term, Volodymyr Kravchenko was seeking renewal but reaction to his public talk was quite fractious and there was some evident tension, particularly among members of the Ukrainian community. It seemed astonishing that whereas his predecessor had served for two decades, his ended so quickly, particularly since he had come from Ukraine. Ironically, his namesake Bohdan had also departed after five years, but at a time when many Canadian Ukrainians were anxious to take advantage of the opening of Ukraine. Volodymyr was somewhat old style in his approach, as he freely admitted, and he had fired the long-serving leader of the Ukrainian Language and Education Program, Marusia Petryshyn, very abruptly at the beginning of his term.

The other academic staff were in their 60s and 70s, so the need for rejuvenation was clear, but Kravchenko had gathered an exciting group of young postgraduate students with the potential to chart new waters. Possibly the key factor was that upon appointment, CIUS turned out to be very different from what he had anticipated. As a Director within a faculty, he had considerably less power than earlier Directors.

In the Department of History and Classics, the three professors involved in Russian and East European history – John-Paul Himka, Heather Coleman, and myself – had the largest contingent of graduate students. At one time the number was around 20, though they graduated in rapid succession between 2015 and 2019. Many studied and emanated from Ukraine, but we had others whose homelands were Moldova and Belarus. In addition to History and Classics, the only other department with a significant group of scholars working on Ukraine was Modern Languages and Cultural Studies (MLCS), which including the Folklore Center, had around eight faculty at its peak. As a result of a combination of program closures and retirements, the number depleted rapidly, however. Thus, History and Classics had the best potential to replenish the ageing staff of CIUS.

Though the 2012 directorship was advertised as an open position, that had not been the case when Kohut's various terms ended. He had been renewed without competition from outside or within. But by 2017, after CIUS was integrated into the Faculty of Arts and the university was suffering from provincial budget cuts resulting from the decline in world oil prices, it was evident that the search for a new director could only be an internal one. The Dean of Arts, Lesley Cormack, who was a member of my department, placed an advertisement accordingly, within the university for the position of CIUS Director.

A few weeks earlier, Kuzio and I began to have some online and public clashes, which began with a fairly polite YouTube debate, mediated by the affable UkeTube Director, William Szuch, on "Ukrainian Nationalism, Volhyn 1943, and Decommunization," which aired on July 26, 2017. Kuzio was sitting at his home in Amsterdam, a large whiskey on the table in front of him. It was apparent that we had some fundamental differences of opinion on all three issues, but once again the equation of Stalinism and Nazism, the subject of the Memory Laws, came to the fore. Kuzio's position on Bandera was that he was not a significant figure in the history of Ukrainian nationalism, "a nobody." But as one of my former PhD students commented afterward in an editorial: "You may hate or praise Bandera for what he did or did not do, but his standing as one of the most important figures in the history of OUN is undeniable."

As for the Holocaust, my comprehension of its horrors grew gradually over the years, no doubt enhanced by the visit I paid to Auschwitz and Birkenau with my former graduate student Victoria Plewak, then spending a year in Katowice, Poland; as well as peregrinations to former Jewish historical cities and places like Hrodna in Belarus, Bialystok in Poland, Babyn Yar in Ukraine and later the Trascianiec death camp just outside Minsk. I was also influenced by the writings of Jan Gross and Omer Bartov, two scholars who offered

starkly honest and frank appraisals of the attitudes to and neglect of the Jewish past in contemporary Poland and parts of Ukraine. The point was not negotiable as far as I was concerned: the Holocaust was the epochal event of the 20th century. Kuzio appeared to dispute that fact. But he ended the debate jovially and incorrectly by declaring that the civility of the debate derived from the fact that we were both Yorkshiremen. Perhaps we were restrained, but I was not born in Yorkshire.

It seemed that for some time, there were no applications for a new CIUS Director. Dean Lesley Cormack sent me an email asking if I were interested. I was, since there would have been a certain poetic finale to my career to end where I started, and have the freedom and resources to build something new. But I was reluctant to abandon my position as Chair of History and Classics, which I thought equally important. In terms of a career move, it would have been a step sideways, even downward in administrative terms. In fairness I had not thought of myself as an administrator until I took on the Chair's position.

There were other possibilities, such as my colleague Heather Coleman or Alla Nedashkivska from MLCS. But when I submitted an application, it appeared I was the only applicant, a circumstance that led some in the community to suspect and declare that the Faculty wanted to railroad its preferred candidate into the position. After my application was completed, I booked a flight to Toronto on impulse and went to talk with the CIUS Toronto office staff: Frank Sysyn, Marko Stech, Andrii Makuch, and Tom Prymak. I thought the meeting over lunch at a Japanese restaurant was useful and amicable. I also received encouragement from my longtime friend Marta Dyczok when we met in the evening.

In Edmonton, I also approached some of my friends in the community: Roman Petryshyn, the former Director of the Ukrainian Canadian Center at Grant MacEwan University, and Olenka Bilash, the Professor of Education who had been at CIUS from its beginning, and whom I had also met in Tokyo the previous summer. Both wrote reference letters for me. Roman is the godfather of my younger son Keelan and had been my next-door neighbor between 1987 and 1994. We had celebrated Ukraine's Declaration of Independence on the lawn between our houses in August 1991, when local media were desperate for some input on events. The three of us had several meetings in which they expressed their ideas for the future of CIUS.

Prior to my talk and interview, Kuzio went on the attack, circulating messages on social media explaining why I should not get the position. Chief among them were my allegedly nebulous position on the Holodomor, my Open Letter

about the Memory Laws, and my reluctance to acknowledge the analogies between Nazism and Stalinism. Notably, all these reasons were based on my research, suggesting that to adopt positions not in line with the prevailing narratives in the diaspora – or those of Kuzio himself – was tantamount to an offence. The concept of academic freedom of opinion, so precious to any university, was simply alien to him. He soon went further, circulating a private email I had sent to him in 2005, in which I stated that there was no need for a CIUS office in Toronto. I was astounded that anyone would keep personal emails for 12 years, ostensibly in the hope of using them as ammunition at a later date.

Kuzio's motives were unclear, especially given his earlier amicability. I could only assume that our debate had festered the anger within him. He had also been released by CIUS so surely could not expect that his opinions counted for much. Indeed, alone, they would have made as much difference as his tirades against Dominique Arel, Chair of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Ottawa had made to that scholar's reputation, i.e. none at all. But he had struck a chord on social media and there were others willing to join in and start a campaign against me.

I thought the job talk, held in the University Senate Chamber, went well. It was videotaped and could be seen not only in Alberta but all across Canada and abroad. Anyone could comment. One of my PhD students asked me about Kuzio's campaign, other questions were about the future of CIUS Press. As we were closing, there was still one hand in the air. The Dean announced that question time was over, but I asked her to allow a final one.

It was from a man I had never seen before, from outside the university.

"What would you do if you are boycotted by the community?"

It was a manifestation of how far things had come. I thought back to the Bandera affair of 2010 and the discussions of the Memory Laws.

The interview with the Search Committee likewise seemed to go well. I knew most of the people on the committee. CIUS had representation from its Acting Director Jars Balan, with whom I had spoken at some length beforehand, while the community was represented by Andrii Hladyshevsky, whom I had always respected.

Afterward, however, the social media campaign reached new heights. There were several leaks from the Search Committee, a complete violation of the

privacy of the application. Thus, I found myself reading negative reviews from people I had known for years. Some were balanced. Others, such as a letter from a disbarred Edmonton lawyer prominent in the Ukrainian community to the University President David Turpin, were simply scurrilous.

I watched a program on YouTube on which I was attacked at an assembly of the World Congress of Ukrainians in Toronto by someone completely unknown to me. At the front of the room sat UCC president, Paul Grod, with whom I had breakfasted the previous week, and Marko Stech, whom I had known for years. I was aghast that neither offered any response in my defense. (Stech told me later he deeply regretted his silence. Many others offered their belated support.) Two who did defend me constantly were Natalia Pylypiuk and Oleh Ilnytzkyj from MLCS, as did also my faithful graduate students from Ukraine on the Facebook page "Ukrainians in Edmonton," where most of the attacks circulated. I began to realize how Magocsi must have felt in 1980 or John-Paul Himka for the previous ten years.

I learned also that the threats to withdraw public endowments had some impact on the Dean, as did a meeting with Frank Sysyn and one with a major donor to CIUS. But that was not quite how the matter was addressed. The Dean's view was that I was an important researcher – indeed a University Cup winner – and that she would not put me in a situation where such abuse could continue. That also meant she had no intention of making a stand on my behalf. I opted to withdraw from the campaign, still stunned by the hostility I had encountered.

In retrospect, this was the right move though at the time it seemed like a cowed backdown. I would have been up for a fight. CIUS had become a troubled institution, however, and I had no wish for a career embroiled in conflict, of which there seemed to be plenty already.

After my withdrawal, some of the postdoctoral fellows there offered me sympathy, as did many others from the community. Olenka told me she was ashamed of her community's reaction. I resigned from all my CIUS positions, such as the Advisory Board and Editorial Board of the *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*. I declined to attend any CIUS functions thereafter, other than a talk by my PhD student Ernest Gyidel, which I had promised beforehand to chair. As with Dobczansky earlier in Washington, I was no longer certain whom I could call a friend, it was a different world and I had moved from the inside to the outside. The Department Council meeting of History and Classics applauded when I told them I would be continuing in my position, an endorsement I sorely needed.

For the first time in my experience, public opinion from outside the university had counted for more than scholarly achievement and peer evaluation within it. I was well qualified for the position, and had even served as Acting Director of CIUS in 1999–2000 when Zenon Kohut was on sabbatical leave. I had edited the *Journal* and the Newsletter's English version, and had the main responsibility for CIUS Press for many years. And in terms of scholarly output, I probably had more publications than any potential external candidate – incidentally the same lament that Magocsi had offered in his own memoirs.

None of this mattered, since my research publications caused offence in certain quarters, including among donors. UkeTube ran a program with the headline "David Marples writes bad things about Ukrainian history," apparently oblivious of the contradictions in that phrase. Also, perhaps, though I am not certain, there may have been concerns that I was not of Ukrainian background though in the past that factor had made little difference to my reception at community events. In fact, it could be regarded as an asset. I had come full circle: the warm embrace by the community had become a cold rebuff. The door seemed firmly shut.

Balan was asked to stay on as Acting Director, an unusual decision given his apparent lack of qualifications – a completed PhD was one of the job requirements – and before long the "Acting" disappeared from his job title. I had no issues with Jars whom I had known for years and who is a very likeable and good-natured man, but I was perturbed after my experience that the position was handed over to someone without any job talk or interview, and extended until the summer of 2020. It made a mockery of the hiring process.

Still, there had been obvious signs after the events in 2014–2015 that the community demanded positive appraisals of all aspects of Ukraine, including its past. Often this translated into permanent assertions of victimhood, often in a very simplified form. I had to be careful not to overstress my own feelings of victimhood and deal with the reality: that CIUS, the institution that in many ways began my career, was no longer part of my working environment.

I did ask myself whether these events were a result of the consequences of Maidan, and concluded that in some respects that was the case. Whereas my editorial on Bandera had offended many in the community, the subsequent polarization of views as a result of Maidan and Russia's conquest of Crimea divided not only academics, but also the general public, and particularly those of Ukrainian background. Militant Russophobes who earlier were on the fringes of discussions now had ample freedom to espouse their views on social media. In more elitist circles, some of the articles published by *The*

Atlantic Council seemed to me narrow-minded and politically indoctrinated. I saw my erstwhile colleague Bohdan Nahaylo berated for criticizing some of the policies of Poroshenko. Perhaps by authorizing the annexation of Crimea, Putin appeared to have justified many long-held views in Ukrainian circles that Russia was, and had always been, an imperialist power, like a self-fulfilling prophecy.

It was time to move on. In November 2018, I organized, with funding from the Department of National Defense, a major conference on the war in the Donbas that tried to see all sides of the question. The conference was officially organized by the Kule Institute of Advanced Studies, and I was the sole coordinator in the field of Ukrainian studies. I invited many scholars whose names appeared on a list provided to me by Mikhail Minakov. My main criteria were expertise, open-mindedness, and the ability to present a paper in English. The speakers included Sergiy Kudelia, Kimitaka Matsuzato, Alina Cherviatsova, Tetyana Malyarenko, Oksana Mikheieva, Natalia Stepaniuk, Serhii Yekelchyk, and Bill Risch, all of whom we flew into Edmonton for the event from Ukraine, Japan, the United States, and Victoria, and Ottawa in Canada; along with a stalwart group of more local people such as Sergey Sukhankin, Alla Hurska, Oleksandr Melnyk, and Ernest Gyidel.

Our mandate was to come up with solutions to the war in the east, but the views varied more than any I had heard hitherto on the Ukraine-Russia conflict. Matsuzato, for example, had spent weeks at a time in the occupied parts of Donbas and interviewed the main players. Kudelia's solutions seemed to some present to be offering too many concessions to the Russians, the same sort of sentiment expressed with regard to Zelensky's peace proposals following his election as Ukrainian president in the summer of 2019. For me, however, the gathering was a reassuring sign that it *was* possible to hold an academic debate on political issues in Ukraine without the intrusion of petty politics. At the time of writing, I was preparing collected articles from the conference for publication.

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Chajsy: Back to Stalin

In 2017, Belarus introduced a five-day visa-free regime for travelers from 80 countries. The only criteria were that one had to arrive at Minsk International Airport from the west and return by the same route. By 2019, the time limit was extended to 30 days, enough time to carry out a research program. Joyfully, in 2017, I had taken advantage of the new opening and had no issues at Passport Control though I had to put away my Canadian passport with all its rejection stamps – the latest one from 2015 – and present a bright red new EU-UK one, which I had never used before.

There was no time to do much other than visit some old friends, and visit museums and the National Library, though some of the city media were very interested in my return. A reporter from Radio Svaboda interviewed me while walking around the city, asking me what had changed and whether Lukashenka was a dictator. Minsk had changed quite dramatically in my seven-year absence and was clearly becoming the showpiece of the republic. The historical part of the city had been beautifully restored and now resembled a European city with cafes, restaurants, cobbled streets, musicians playing outdoors, and new hotels and boutiques. Obviously, there were far more private enterprises than encountered during previous visits.

My hotel was a new Western one, a Double Tree by Hilton, and with Western standards. It was built alongside and with indoor links to Galleria, a large shopping mall with five floors, including a food court on the top floor and a food store on the ground floor. I visited the new Museum of the Great Patriotic War, which I had never had an opportunity to do when writing *'Our Glorious Past.'* It was impressively laid out, with groups of schoolchildren being escorted around.

I had now become interested, however, in the period just prior to the outbreak of the "Great Patriotic War," and specifically the period 1937–1941, which seemed to me the most notable blank spot in the history of Belarus.

I returned the following spring and began to elaborate a new research project that returned to a topic I have mentioned earlier in this chronicle, namely NKVD mass executions at the Kurapaty site to the north of Minsk. In 1994, I had written what might be termed an exploratory article on the topic that appeared in the American *Slavic Review*. Now I thought it should be possible to go further and provide an updated study.

I had been corresponding with a PhD candidate at the Polish Academy of Sciences, Veranika Laputska, and we decided it would be of mutual interest and benefit to combine our efforts. She is from Minsk and had assisted me with *'Our Glorious Past'* and could help me at times when it was difficult to allocate time for research in Belarus. She is also a renowned linguist. In September 2019, I was finally free to carry out a period of sustained fieldwork, visiting Kurapaty and other sites. Even though the KGB Archives remained closed, the consequences of our findings were so profound that I began to question some of the conclusions I had reached over many years of research, namely that one could not compare Nazism and Stalinism. Thus the concept behind books such as *Bloodlands* was seriously misleading. We also faced some serious problems in dealing with such a topic.

By way of background to these, since the study of Stalinist rule in Belarus (the Belorussian SSR) in the West is not a subject of broad perusal, I would cite three sobering facts. The first is the fate of Belarusian party leaders between 1920 and 1937. I compiled a list of these and append my notes below for clarification:

Vilgelm Knorish 1890-1939, Latvian, 1920–1923, and May 1927–Dec 1928, purged and shot during Latvian Operation

Aleksandr Nikolaevich Asatkin 1885–1937, Russian, led CPB 1923–1924. Arrested July 5, 1937 when member of CC CPU, shot Sept 2, 1937, rehab 1957

Aleksandr Ivanovich Krinitsky 1894–1937, Russian, May 1924–Dec 1925. Arrested Jul 20, 1937, executed Oct 30, 1937

Nikolai Matveevich Goloded (Mikalai Haladzei), 1894–1937, Belarusian, Head of BSSR govt 1927–1937, English source says 1st Sec, Russian says 2nd Sec. Arrested in Moscow, Jun 14, 1937, sent to Minsk, fell out of 5th floor window of NKVD HQ

Yan Garmarnik, aka Yakov Tzudikovich Gamarnik, 1894–1937, Dec 4, 1928–Jan 3, 1930, Jewish military leader from Zhytomyr. Committed suicide in 1937.

Konstantin Veniaminobich Gey 1896–1939, German/Russian, Jan 1930–Jan 1932, arrested Oct 2, 1938, shot in 1939

Nikolai Fedorovich Gikalo, 1897–1938, Jewish from Odessa. Jan 1932–Mar 1937–purged party by 50%, moved to Kharkiv as 1st sec. Arrested Oct 11, 1937, shot following April. Rehabilitated 1955

Vasily Fomich Sharangovich (Vasil Famich Sharanhovich), 1897–1938, Belarusian, Minsk region, Mar 1937–Jul 1937, arrested Jul 1937 as member of Rightist-Trotskyist anti-Soviet bloc with 20 others. Shot Mar 15, 1938. Rehab 1957 and restored to party 1958.

Yakov Arkadievich Yakovlev, 1896–1938, Jewish from Hrodna, a Russian source says Bialystok, Jul 27–Aug 8, 1937. Arrested in Moscow, Oct 12, 1937, shot Jul 29, 1938, rehab 1958

Aleksey Volkov 1890–1942, Russian, Aug 11, 1937–Jun 18, 1938. Not arrested

Thus, the first nine party leaders of the republic had all died by one means or another by 1937–1938, making this surely the most dangerous position in the Soviet Union. And yet, virtually all studies of Kurapaty were maintaining that peasants, rather than party leaders, were the main victims of the executions. Such statements put the scale of the shootings on a much wider scale.

The second problem was one of investigation of these events in Belarus itself. I found one apparently reliable text, published in 1994, meaning that research for the book had been conducted when the KGB Archives were still open. Subsequently, Kurapaty became part of a political struggle between the Lukashenka regime and the opposition. To some extent this development was preordained by the fact that Zianon Pazniak, leader of the Conservative Christian Party of the Belarusian Popular Front, a far-right political group that was an offshoot of the original BPF founded in the late 1980s, had carried out the original archaeological findings that revealed the mass grave. As noted earlier, he had published his findings in a Belarusian literary newspaper in 1988.

When the authorities tried to cut off the burial site by various means, such as road and business construction, oppositionists defended the area, sometimes for months on end. By 2017–2019, the chief defenders of the site came from organizations such as the Youth Front and the unregistered Christian-Democratic Party, much to the consternation of Pazniak, who had fled into

exile in 1996, and now divides his time between US and Poland, though he is most often residing in Warsaw. Official newspapers referred to the defense of Kurapaty and estimates of the number of deaths there according to Pazniak – between 30,000 and 250,000 – as "privatizing" the past.

In turn, the most prolific writer on Kurapaty in Belarus was Igor Kuznetsov (Ihar Kuzniacou), an Associate Professor at the Belarusian State University. Yet Kuznetsov's figures on executions, "repressions," and arrests varied widely from one article to another, and none of his papers were in refereed journals. Virtually all were in media or social media. He evidently knows neither Polish nor English and thus his circulation may be limited to Russian and Belarusian-language journals, which would restrict his choices of venue. But the results to date of his research are thoroughly confusing, especially on the number of victims, "repressed," and deported. Yet, he is often the main scholarly representative both on and at the Kurapaty site, where he shows visitors around. He is scolded by the authorities, and reviled by the opposition, particularly Pazniak, who thinks Kuznetsov is a KGB agent.

The third issue is something encountered on the 2019 visit – the sheer scale of the executions – something that in fairness Kuznetsov was one of the first to point out before he got lost in a muddle of numbers. Kurapaty contained about 30,000 victims of mass executions, as far as we could determine. But it was far from the only place in Belarus where such deaths were brought about. Every major city from Minsk eastward has a mass execution site, usually a forest or close to a forest and some distance from the major city. Western cities such as Hrodna or Brest were not part of the Belorussian SSR until September 1939, and then only for a 20-month period before the outbreak of war, but in all the others, the NKVD rounded up and shot prisoners, farmers, managers, party leaders and anyone accused of collaboration with Stalin's real and perceived enemies or foreign states – usually Britain, Poland, or Japan. In Minsk there are at least twelve such sites. Most have been discovered over the past five years.

But there lies a problem because there are few archival sources available to verify the identity of many victims – some have been identified because of their ethnic origin, such as Latvians and Lithuanians in Vorsha region. And the discoveries and monitoring of the commemorative sites that have arisen are in the hands of Pazniak's party. As a rule, these people are not scholars, let alone historians. But they are sincere and earnest in their task of uncovering the truth about the fate of the victims. But I am moving ahead of my narrative.

I had first visited Kurapaty in the fall of 1992, and gathered materials in the National Library on which I based my article for *Slavic Review* (1994). I

returned in 2017, and noted that the defenders had erected over 100 crosses along the route and roadside to commemorate the victims. Under some pressure, the government acceded to the erection of an official monument, based on a competition, and by September 2019, it had been constructed at the very center of the memorial in the forest: four pillars with a bell in the center, not dissimilar to the largest official war monument at Khatyn, about 50 kilometers from Minsk, but that one is more elaborate and encompasses an entire village, burned down by the Nazis and their accomplices. Coaches to the site leave regularly from Minsk. By contrast, only some trade union officials had turned up for the official opening of the new monument at Kurapaty. The event was ignored by government leaders.

Close to the entrance to the Kurapaty site in September 2019 was a large restaurant, with an entrance gate, and adorned with the name “Let’s Go! Let’s Eat!” It is owned by an Israeli-Belarusian businessman, Boris Suris and his locally based counterpart, Leonid Zaides, and bitterly resented by the Kurapaty defenders, who have tried to block the entrance and prevent people from entering. Its defenders have maintained that there are similar restaurants operating near mass grave sites, including near the Yama pit in Minsk, where 5,000 Jews were killed. A large billboard on the roadside was advertising “Let’s Go! Let’s Eat!” and a small number of people were gathering outside. The last thing I needed was to be detained at a protest so I did not approach any closer.

Shortly after my third visit to Kurapaty, bulldozers arrived and smashed down all the crosses by the roadside, and a fence was then erected around the forest. President Lukashenka talked about opening an exhibition center there while the official media complained about attempts to “privatize” a tragedy. Vandals also smashed into four pieces a bench donated by US president Bill Clinton, during his visit to Belarus in 1994. In truth, the bench had been damaged several times before despite its innocuous message “To the Belarusian people from the United States of America.” Clearly the memory of Kurapaty is still contested.

Later, on the same visit, Ales Lahviniec, a well-known political activist formerly linked with the Milinkievič camp, Veranika, and I drove to a small, remote village, Sielishcha, in Vorsha region on the Russian border, seeking the abode of one Jurka Kopcik. We tried several houses along the dirt track that passes for a road in many Belarusian villages, and were eventually directed to the poorest house in the vicinity, a brown wooden shack, with a sloping roof and an overgrown but substantial garden that contained a number of beehives. No one answered the door when we knocked, so Ales walked right into the single room that was replete with food utensils, an unkempt sink,

unused fireplace, and a table crammed with honey and pickles, and beckoned to us to follow him. Jurka had been sleeping but rose quickly from his bed in the corner and simply added layers of clothing without undressing.

As we drank tea and ate bread and honey, Jurka related his past and his family's victimization in the Stalin period – many of his relatives had been arrested. He spoke only Belarusian. A faded photograph of his great grandmother hung on the wall. We then returned to the car and Jurka donned a deerstalker hat that clearly had been in his possession for many years. He had talked constantly for about an hour, but when we were alone, he suddenly switched to English:

"And where are you from, David?"

I almost fell over with shock.

'Western Canada," I responded.

"Oh, very good."

He then reverted back to Belarusian and never spoke another word of English until we departed. He took us over a disused railway line to a forest about ten kilometers from the city of Vorsha, called Kabyliaki. Small signs on trees directed to the "place of mass burials," gravesites of those executed in 1937–1938, often accused of being Polish spies, and over a considerable area. One sign, black, and with red, blue, and purple flowers around it announced that it commemorated the victims of the Communist regime, 1930–1953. The ground was wet. At the edge of the forest the sign of the Orthodox Church had been erected. All the memorial was the work of locals, and not the authorities, which had provided no support and sometimes had obstructed the efforts to erect it.

Jurka had been talking with Veranika, and she informed me that he had formerly worked as a journalist for the local newspaper, and that she found him highly intelligent. What had happened, I wondered, that prompted him to live such a secluded life, and in such squalor? It made no sense.

Our next stop was the hamlet of Chajsy, near Viciebsk, and right on the Russian border, a relatively short journey. We met our host, Yan Dziarzhautsau, in the center of the city and Ales drove us to another heavily forested area, with similar signs to the ones at Kabyliaki. The difference was the scale. Chajsy was another Kurapaty, perhaps even larger. Evidently Yan,

another Belarusian speaker and avid member of the Christian Conservative Party of the Belarusian Front, related that he had been standing at a bus stop nearby in 2014 and overheard someone saying that they were too afraid to go through the forest because of all the corpses buried there. He investigated further and he and others found innumerable graves, some containing corpses. The graves were clear to us as deep holes throughout the forest, many marked with crosses. Yan was in his late 50s, a small, stocky man who wore a blue anorak and cap, and carried a walking stick.

Yan and his colleagues had alerted the local authorities, who came and removed the bodies, but chose not to delve further into the stories behind them. The removal had been sloppy. Bones remained behind and we even detected one on the path through the forest. There were also shoes, items of clothing, and a hairbrush, the owner of which was traced by the unofficial investigators. Yan informed us that people of Latvian ancestry had been living in the area since the days of the Russian Empire, and many of them where caught up in Stalin's Latvian Operation in 1940, after the Soviet annexation of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania. In fact, he had managed to interview the last surviving member of the village to have recalled the events before he died. He showed us lists of names and biographical information that they had managed to compile. It was incomplete, of course, but much more information than had been ascertained from Kurapaty. As we passed by a cornfield on the edge of the forest, Yan remarked that the crop was bountiful, as human bodies provided natural supplements.

During the same visit, we spent long hours in the National Library, and waded through the official newspapers, *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* and *Zviazda* for the years 1937–1938 to ascertain coverage of political events. Some were simply ignored, such as the removal and replacement of party leaders. But there was ample evidence of the purges and ensuing trials. A case would develop slowly against an individual or group of individuals, especially those with suspicious backgrounds, such as foreign birth, or parents who were considered kulaks, or else kulaks themselves. In every region of Belarus, the cases developed and ultimately, the group would be arrested and accused of various crimes, the most frequent of which was spying for Poland – an obsession of Stalin – or of being a member of either rightist or leftist opposition to the Soviet leader.

Then a trial would result, sometimes at a military court, at others a civilian court or simply by troika. At the military courts, local Stakhanovites[15] would be gathered to witness the trial, many of which wrote comments in the

[15] Stakhanovites were record breakers in industry, following the example of the Donbas coal miner, Aleksey Stakhanov, who allegedly hewed 112 tons of coal in a single shift in late August 1935. The Stakhanovite movement peaked in 1936–1937.

newspaper afterward, and the sentence was always “death by shooting.” In other cases, defendants were accused of sabotaging agricultural equipment or poisoning animals. It was a grim, but fascinating picture of a society in the grip of madness, and at several levels, with no sector of society safe. But why was the Purge taking on such extreme forms in this small republic, which was hardly surging with nationally conscious, anti-Soviet elements?

Pazniak, whom we had interviewed in Warsaw before arrival in Minsk, maintains that the Stalin regime conducted a genocide of the Belarusian people. But if one is speaking purely in ethnic terms, the statement seems unlikely to be accurate. The sweeping executions of 1937–1938, as distinct from the later ones of 1939–1941, targeted several groups, including kulaks, but its viciousness stemmed, in my view, from his phobia about Poland, Poles, and Pilsudski, and alleged plans to invade the USSR with the support of Germany or the Western Powers. Poles had been removed en masse from the border regions in the early 1930s, but many remained, especially in the western part of Minsk region. The Polish Operation of 1937, after the execution of so-called kulaks, was the decisive action of the period, and embraced far more than ethnic Poles. Nevertheless, the purpose was to end any threat from Poland.

I was shaken by the sheer scale of Chajsy, but also by the complete failure and reluctance of the Belarusian government to offer any form of recognition to the thousands of victims. After all, we were over 80 years on, and no one remained from the period with living memory of the past, just as in the Famine in Ukraine. And the government was moving in precisely the opposite direction, namely, to commemorate the war victory, the Partisans, and the Soviet Army. Thus, in the Park Chaliukintsau, four metro stops from the city center, the small monument dedicated to victims of Stalin erected by oppositionists is simply overshadowed by the adjacent, impressive monument to the Partisans. Minsk is a city devoted to remembering the wartime victory, and May 9 (Victory Day) and July 3 (Independence Day) are the main state occasions of commemoration, with parades and speeches, the president and his youngest son on the platform in military uniforms.

I have concluded that Stalin the war hero is here to stay, his crimes forgotten or ignored, at least in Belarus and Russia. The families of Stalin’s victims remain silent, as has been demonstrated by Western scholars and analysts such as Orlando Figes (*The Whisperers*, 2007) and Shaun Walker (*The Long Hangover: Putin’s New Russia and the Ghosts of the Past*, 2018), as they have done for years. And silence breeds ignorance and myth. Such a dilemma likely cannot be resolved in these countries, it is largely dependent on outside researchers. In Russia today it is a criminal offence to engage in

historical revisionism about the war; in Belarus, no publisher would print a book that questioned the basic tenets of the war narrative, slightly different from that of Russia with the same underlying themes – and Stalin was the victor. That is not to adhere to the double genocide theory; rather to say that in the places where he conducted the most violent crimes – other than Ukraine – the real Stalin is unknown.

But in Belarus there remain mass graves, unexplored and until recently mostly forgotten. That is perhaps the real legacy of the Soviet Union, which some citizens remember – or claim they remember – with some nostalgia and fondness. There is also the matter of media attention, and focus. The majority of Viciebsk residents, I would surmise, who are about 340,000 in number, probably have no idea that there are mass graves in the forest around them. Yet thousands attend the annual Slavianski Bazaar, an international festival featuring artists from all three neighboring countries: Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, and often attended by the country's leaders. The past, however, is not forgotten, it is simply interwoven into the official state historical narrative of what should be emphasized and what omitted.

As for an historian, there is only so much one can do. We are perhaps a dying breed, but I would argue nonetheless that we are needed, if only to draw attention to failed precedents and mistakes, and the horrific consequences of what happens when totalitarian systems are established in Europe, or elsewhere. Above all, in the 2020s, what is sorely needed in prevailing narratives is historical perspective, whether in Russia, Ukraine, or Belarus. History cannot be manipulated for political purposes and it should be written by historians, not political leaders. On the other hand, the Soviet legacy was so pervasive and deep rooted that it has proven difficult to overcome it in some states almost 30 years later. Ukraine is on the path to removing all traces of it in most regions, but the crucial question is with what to replace it. Ukraine's president Zelensky is appealing to all sectors of Ukraine to form a common, civic nation, which may prove impossible, a dream.

The problems faced by these states today seem even more complex than in the late 1980s when Gorbachev opened up society. In retrospect, there was more opportunity then for self-expression and open discussion. Recent political events have only served to impede the study of history at a time when it is being used to define new national identities. Many of the problems left unchecked when the USSR collapsed in 1991 are being resolved today in states mired by corruption and, in the case of Belarus and Russia, authoritarian rule. But I perceived signs that Belarus was changing: growing privatization of businesses, a thriving IT industry, and a clear attempt of the government to adopt policies to bring the country closer to Europe while

remaining neutral, in the face of growing Russian pressure for closer integration. None of this is to deny the continuing violations of human rights, manipulated elections, and limited freedom of assembly. But the Stalinist heritage is a bitter one and may take a sustained effort to remove.

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2020

Should we be so immersed in the past? In the Western world, especially North America, other than diasporas, the past might seem irrelevant. But in the former Soviet countries, including those I study – Ukraine, Belarus, Russia – it is often the defining element of contemporary politics. And though I think it is simplistic to keep making comparisons of tyranny, such as Stalin vs Hitler, or the systems they created, or the number of their victims, and while I am personally supportive of the view that the Holocaust is the defining event of modern Europe, one can go further. Stalinism is still full of secrets yet to be discovered. It lasted for a quarter of a century, but elements of it persisted much longer than that. The Gulag camps lasted until the Gorbachev era. Dissidents wasted away in frigid labor camps into the 1980s. And in my own area, mass graves of Stalin's victims are still being revealed by members of the general public, much to the chagrin of local authorities who tolerate or mandate vandalism of the new memorial sites.

We cannot remain dispassionate about such events, such assaults on humanity and family lives. We can permit people to adhere to myths, because that is natural and allows them to continue their existence. But the facts as we know them, and as we discover them, deserve to be known. At the same time, the historians can discuss their findings in public, at conferences, in classes at university or college, but ultimately the quest is an individual one. We need to start with premises, and human values are at the heart of them. Mass killings can never be justified, nor can racism, and in my own view, ethnic nationalism is equally a scourge because it dehumanizes a society, and divides so-called races from each other. I would not denigrate patriotism, which is something quite different. When I began my career, I was interested in finding out about past events, but today I perceive also a humanitarian quest to preserve those elements of society that I consider essential: human rights, openness, tolerance, and academic freedom.

It was in my attempts at discovering and interpreting Ukraine's past that I became an outsider in the group with which I spent the most time –

Ukrainians in the diaspora – having earlier been accepted warmly into their midst. The reality was that they no longer liked what I was writing, based on my research findings. There were no other factors involved. And because my works seemed in their view to undermine their preconceived and long-held notions about their historical past, then they became unacceptable, even chided as Kremlin propaganda, or pro-Russian. They exempted me from directing CIUS, the institution at which I began my career, and they were not supported within my university by my administrative superiors, ostensibly because of a fear of withdrawal of community-based funds – or perhaps because of an apprehension that chaos might result should my appointment go ahead. That should not have happened, but it did. It should not have happened because nothing I wrote had any impact or influence on my affection for Ukraine, which could hardly be changed. The country is much bigger than narrow-minded nationalism or for that matter the violent pro-Russian separatists still fighting in the east. Ukraine has at last removed the vestiges of Stalinism, but it must be careful not to implant something equally corrosive in its place.

In Belarus, I never expected my presence in the country to be affected by continued travel bans. It had never entered my head that the government would prohibit entry to scholars, especially given the limited attention to the country from the outside world. Paradoxically, the bans gave my work sudden importance and recognition, and Belarusians wrote to me that I should regard them as "a badge of honor." But it was terribly frustrating. In some ways it was similar to being ostracized by my former friends in the Ukrainian community. When it ended – with the visa-free regime introduced in 2017 – I was absurdly grateful. All the same, I am still an insider as far as the Belarusian diaspora is concerned and Belarusians are fairly free of the more radical types of nationalism one can find in Ukraine. Many of my friends there – especially in the younger generation under 40 – speak Belarusian exclusively, and try to acquire for Kurapaty the sort of symbolic importance attached to the Holodomor in Ukraine. I think they may succeed and I intend to continue helping them in that task.

I feel very privileged to have lived and worked as a scholar at an academic institution like the University of Alberta. I doubt very much whether many 21st century historians will be given the same sort of opportunities at universities, particularly if we continue the unfortunate path that equates success with high-paying jobs, and universities as no more than a path to a lucrative career. It is known as the New Budget Model and destined for failure. But until its demise it can do much damage to the integrity of universities and the concept of scholarly inquiry and independent thought. It means that students can no longer opt to study the questions that intrigue them, unless they are linked to some future, lucrative career option. In the Arts and Humanities, the

prospects are very limited since they are not structured in such a fashion, nor could they be.

In an era of fake news, trolls, and hybrid warfare in several parts of the world, the historian is needed today more than at any time in the past. Vladimir Putin's 2020 statement that Poland is responsible for starting the Second World War is a case in point. Donald J. Trump's less serious, but equally telling comment about success in the American Civil War being dependent on control of the airports is another. There is no equation between talent or brilliance and the acquisition of political leadership on a world level (Angela Merkel excepted), though one would accept that a certain innate cunning and ruthlessness are needed, as well as financial backing in the US case.

In short, we cannot leave interpretations of the past to governments and we must maintain our honesty and humanity, no matter where it leads us. Otherwise, we are without integrity and life becomes meaningless.

Photographs

Chajsy memorial, Viciebsk Region, Belarus

Holodomor Memorial, Kyiv (courtesy of Veranika Laputska)

The author at the Kurapaty monument in 2019 (courtesy of Veranika Laputska)

The author speaking in Warsaw, 2014 (courtesy of Belarus in Focus).

With Stanislau Shushkevich and Dmitry Kozikis, Minsk, 1996.

Discussion with the Belarusian Friendship Society, Minsk, 1997.

Kyiv from the Dnipro River, 2007.

With Gennady Grushevoy in Minsk.

With Adi Roche, Yulia Shymko, and the Mankevich family, Minsk, 1997.

Oles Piatak and I.P. Los, Center for Radiation Medicine, Kyiv, 1989.

The town of Chernobyl, May 1989.

Ferryboat on the Lena River, summer 1998.

The author near Yakutsk, 1998.

Prypiat hothouse, 1989.

Highly irradiated pine shoots from Red Forest, Chernobyl.

Entrance to the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies (CIUS), Pembina Hall, University of Alberta.

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This book describes the author's academic journey from an undergraduate in London to his current research on Ukraine and Belarus as a History professor in Alberta, Canada. It highlights the dramatic changes of the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods, his travel stories, experiences, and the Stalinist legacy in both countries. It includes extended focus on his visits to Chernobyl and the contaminated zone in the late 1980s and 1990s, as well as a summer working with indigenous groups in eastern Siberia. Visiting Belarus more than 25 times since the 1990s, he was banned for seven years before the visa rules were relaxed in 2017. In the case of Ukraine, it chronicles a transition from a total outsider to one of the best-known scholars in Ukrainian studies, commenting on aspects of the coalescence of scholarship and politics, and the increasing role of social media and the Diaspora in the analysis of crucial events such as the Euromaidan uprising and its aftermath in Kyiv.

About the Author

David R. Marples is a Distinguished University Professor of Russian and East European History at the Department of History and Classics, University of Alberta, Canada. He is the author of sixteen single-authored books, including *Our Glorious Past: Lukashenka's Belarus and the Great Patriotic War* (2014), and *Heroes and Villains: Creating National History in Contemporary Ukraine* (2008). He has published over 100 articles in peer-reviewed journals. He has also co-edited four books on nuclear power and security in the former Soviet Union, contemporary Belarus, and most recently, *Hiroshima-75: Nuclear issues in Global Contexts* [with Aya Fujiwara] (Stuttgart: ibidem Verlag, 2020).

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