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UKRAINE: 1963

By LEV BRODSKY
(As told to LEO HELMAN)

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Till the day I left the Soviet Union in February of 1963, I was employed as an assistant camera-unit director at the USCD (Ukrainian Studio of Film Chronicles and Documentary Motion Pictures) in Kiev.

How I left the USSR is something which can't be told as long as certain people are alive. Let me say that saying goodbye to the "socialist paradise" was very costly—in money, health, suffering, and otherwise.

Luckily, I was not married at the time, and a fictitious marriage with a Polish woman—arranged at the price of 15,000 new rubles (about \$17,000 at the official exchange rate), enabled me to obtain the desired exit permit to Warsaw, from where it was comparatively easy to continue my odyssey to freedom.

To get the 15,000 rubles, I was forced to steal unprocessed movie tapes, cut them into yard-long strips for Leica-type cameras, and sell them on the black market at cut-rate prices.

I thus ran the risks of being arrested by the police, charged with "robbery of state property" and sentenced to death by firing squad under the new laws which provide mandatory death sentences.

I would have done anything, including murder, to get out of the Soviet Union, and I am not ashamed of stealing the USCD films. To be sure, I wasn't the only one to live off such rackets. The salaries at our film studios weren't bad, but people who wanted a decent suit of clothes, or some extra money—as I did—had to supply Leica films to amateur photographers on the black market. In any free society, the prices for consumer goods would be much lower, the products easily obtainable, and if a man wanted to buy a house, a car or take a trip abroad, all he has to do is ask his bank for a loan, buy things on the installment plan, or take advantage of some of the "travel now—pay later" schemes.

No such things were possible in the Soviet Union. Our Executive Director, Victor Pichurkin, used to paraphrase Lenin's old dictum "Kto nye rabotayet, tot nye yest" (he who does not work, does not

eat) and tell us that "Kto nye voruyet, tot nye zhivyet" (he who does not steal, does not live). Alas for poor Victor, he was denounced to the OBSCHIS (Otdel Borby s Chishchnishetsvom i Spekulatsey—Department for Combatting Thefts and Speculation) section of the secret police, by his ex-wife, and sentenced to 15 years at hard "corrective" labor in Eastern Siberia.

Now, our studio, like any other commercial, industrial, agricultural or educational enterprise in the Soviet Union, had to work strictly according to the plan. Our annual plan for 1962 provided for completion of 52 weekly newsreels, 6 full-length documentary-historical films, 6 travelogue movies, and 26 two-reel propaganda and films on subjects of current interest.

Unexposed film was delivered to our stores in accordance with this plan. Now, since everybody in the studios was stealing unprocessed film for his own use and for profitable resale, we had to register an excessive amount of spoilage, or cutting-room rejects, to account for the missing footage. Inspection and police crackdowns were unavoidable, unless we could give our enterprise such a good name with the authorities as to remain above suspicion. For this, we falsified history, and cooked up such propaganda tripe that even the old communist party members among us could not stomach it any longer.

I'll mention here only a few of the documentary feature titles produced by our crew before going on with my story, describing the conditions and life in Ukraine, as I saw it in 1963 and before.

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First of all, let me mention one fact which may seem unimportant from the Western point of view, but exposes the patent lies and falsehoods of official Soviet propaganda. On paper, Ukraine is a constituent republic of the Soviet Union. It has its "own" Foreign Minister, Prime Minister, President of the Supreme Soviet, Chairman of State Security Committee, etc. But not a single one of the documentary films produced by our studio in 1962 and before was spoken in the Ukrainian language. Even the newsreels, presumably destined for local cinemas, were in Russian. The only documentary film where the Ukrainian language was even mentioned was the 9-reel "Karpatskaya Rapsodya" (Carpathian Rhapsody), describing the life of Ukrainian Hutsul foresters, shepherds and mountaineers high up in the mountains of the Carpathian range. The people filmed on location had their voices taken down on our sound tape in their own peculiar Hutsul dialect. But the running commentary was in Russian.

No one ever suggested that the Ukrainian Studio of Film Chronicles and Documentary Motion Pictures should produce at least half—if not all—of the newsreels and movies in the language of the country it purported to represent.

As a matter of fact, we did have a special sound-effects crew of three men and five women, trained to dub any kind of film in a sort of Russified Ukrainian, in which pure Russian words, inflection, accent and pronunciation outweighed the Ukrainian language roots by about three to one. I was told that newsreels and some of the documentaries earmarked for public showing in certain rural districts were dubbed by our sound effects crew in their Russified Ukrainian. But big-city audiences heard only Russian spoken in the movies. And pure Ukrainian was strictly taboo in the Kiev film studios.

Even our colleagues from the Kiev Art Film Studios and Yalta Entertainment Film Center were not allowed to use more than one or two sentences of unalloyed Ukrainian per picture. Vassili Ivchenko, a good friend of mine, who was a Senior Unit Director with the Kiev Art Films, was praised for his fine work in filming the movie version of the famed "Song of the Forest," by the Ukrainian national poetess, Lesya Ukrainka. But only I know how difficult it was for him to film this Ukrainian epic in the Russian language, throwing in a couple of "pure" Ukrainian sentences now and then strictly for laughs.

In this film, as in any other motion picture produced in the Soviet-controlled Ukrainian studios, the heroes, intellectuals, officers, commissars, beautiful girls and other "positive characters" must speak Russian. The villains speak some kind of bastardized Russian with a phony foreign accent. The Ukrainian sentences are reserved for "simple but honest" folk, usually some mustachioed driver, a strong but dumb blacksmith, or some heavy-set forester who is all brawn and no brain. The obvious implication is that only uneducated, uncouth and "uncultured" persons prefer Ukrainian to Russian, which is supposed to be the language of the "intelligentsia," officialdom, and the educated classes. That this implication is not confined only to movies may be seen by visiting any Ukrainian city in 1963.

Ukrainian is still spoken in the villages and predominantly rural districts. Workers who live in the suburbs and hasten to their shift at the industrial plants, peasants who carry their private-garden produce for sale at the market, and *novobrantzy* (recruits drafted for military service) all still speak Ukrainian even in the towns. But 45 years of Soviet indoctrination, and 200-plus years of Czarist

Russification which preceded the Soviet rule, have placed the Russian language on a kind of pedestal in Ukraine.

Obviously, one can't get ahead in studies, work, employment, or any kind of career if one uses the Ukrainian language. Students who fail exams in the Russian language are not admitted to secondary schools, let alone universities or colleges. Officers do not receive their commissions, if their Russian is not clear, precise and correct. Newspapermen, movie people, writers, artists and lawyers must know Russian first, Ukrainian later, if at all.

Why is this emphasis on the Russification of Ukraine so important to Moscow? For the same reason that the Kremlin rulers are committed to eradicating any kind of independent national thinking. Take the Jews, for instance. The teaching of the Hebrew language in the Soviet Union is a criminal political offense, punishable by up to 12 years of penal servitude. Why? Because Hebrew has been resurrected as a living language by the Zionists, and the Russian communists regard the Jewish national liberation movement as one of their greatest enemies.

Yiddish, an Eastern European Jewish dialect incorporating medieval German, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian and Hebrew roots, is still allowed as a spoken language only. Yiddish-language schools, theaters and newspapers have been closed down. There is a monthly magazine printed by a group of renegade Jewish Communists in a bastardized Yiddish containing a heavy percentage of Russian words.

The campaign against the Ukrainian language has not yet gotten to this stage, but it is well on the way. After all, there are fifteen times as many Ukrainians as Jews in the USSR, and it's not easy to eradicate their linguistic heritage. But the Kremlin masters view the Ukrainian national liberation movement as their mortal enemy, on a par with Zionism. The current trend is to cripple the language, without hurting the so-called "cultural heritage." In other words, millions of copies of books by Shevchenko, Franko and other Ukrainian writers are still being printed, circulated and distributed—but many of them in the Russian language.

Ukrainian songs and operas are performed all over—again in the Russian language. Even Ukrainian folk songs have been adapted to the Russian. So what does the "cultural heritage" mean? Embroidered shirts, folk dances and songs performed in a bastardized, mongrel Russian-Ukrainian dialect.

The same is happening in the neighboring republic of Byelorussia. But the process of enforced Russification is less evident in other Soviet republics. Russian is the dominant, official and "career" language in all corners of the USSR, but Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia,

and the five "Moslem" republics of Central Asia, as well as Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, are still allowed to soft-pedal their process of Russification.

The two other victims are Moldavia and Kazakhstan, which are being speedily turned into Russian-speaking "republics." Tartar, Buryat, Mongol and Circassian districts will be next on the Russification list. The Trans-Caucasian, Baltic, and Central Asia republics (with the exception of Kazakhstan) will be the last. But Ukraine is target Number One of Moscow's master brains.

What makes a nation? People, territorial unity and common language are the most necessary ingredients of nationalism. Common religious faith, destiny, or historical heritage are also important in fanning the flames of national pride. The Soviet system has not changed, but the times we live in have undergone a radical change. It is no longer possible for the Kremlin big-shots to order a genocide campaign of mass executions, deportations or nationwide starvation against Ukraine, or any other non-Russian nation, as Stalin did from 1934 to 1944.

Small-scale repressions and non-violent oppression by "legal" means are still possible, of course. But any large-scale, Nazi-type genocide would cause an immediate world public opinion reaction against Moscow.

Mass media of information, global communications, and cold war propaganda channels have so developed their impact in recent years that not even Moscow can now ignore world public opinion if it is aroused to a sufficient degree of indignation.

On the other hand, the Soviet empire is still committed to a forcible melting-pot unification of the "Great Russian Heartland." This is a geopolitical, rather than a purely ideological concept. Off-hand, I would say that Moscow regards the "Great Russian Heartland" as stretching from the Carpathian Mountains in the west to the Pacific Ocean in the east, and from the Arctic ice wastes in the north, to the Caucasus ranges and the Caspian Sea in the south. This concept encompasses Byelorussia, Ukraine, Moldavia, Kazakhstan and several smaller Tartar, Mongol and Buryat districts as integral parts of "Greater Russia." It leaves the future of the three Baltic states in doubt and permits the existence of the non-Russian Soviet republics of Trans-Caucasia and Central Asia on the outer periphery of the Soviet Union.

In my official capacity as assistant camera-unit director at the Kiev USCD, I travelled all over Ukraine, filming newsreel, documentary and film-chronicle shots. I have thus gained first-hand

knowledge of, and acquaintance with, the true state of affairs in Ukraine, Anno Domini 1963.

Parallel with, and growing out of the enforced Russification process, a planned population shift is evident in recent years. There are over 42 million Ukrainians in the Soviet Union, but only 32 million of them live in Ukraine proper. On the other hand, close to 7½ million Russians have been moved into the Ukrainian Republic within the framework of the "Greater Russian Heartland" integration campaign.

This population shift is evident in the republic's capital, Kiev, and in its southern regions. It is less felt in Western, Northern and Central Ukraine. But Odessa, Simferopol, Yalta, Sevastopol, Kerch and Zhdanov are now more Russian than Ukrainian. The situation in Kiev, Donetsk, Nikolayev, Kherson and Kharkiv is fifty-fifty, with more Russians moving in every month. Chernihiv, Kanev, Zaporozhe, Kirovograd, Lviv, Rovno, Cherkassy, Krivy-Rih, Ternopol, Stanislaviv, Dnepropetrovsk and Poltava are still Ukrainian, but have sizeable Russian population groups.

If, over the next decade, another ten million Ukrainians are forced to migrate eastwards, while twelve million Russians move in to replace them, Ukraine will have a predictable population balance of some 25 million Ukrainians— mostly in the villages, and at least 20 million Russians in the cities and industrial regions. If the Russified Ukrainians are counted as well, the national balance will be tilted into the Russian-Heartland favor, and Ukraine will become just another district of Russia, like the Upper Volga, or the Lower Urals.

What is happening to the dispossessed Ukrainians, and what makes them pack up and move? In the beginning of the planned population-shift program, that is, in the years 1945-1949, more than a million Ukrainians suspected of supporting the nationalist freedom fighters, or sympathizing with the Ukrainian national liberation movement, were deported to Central Asia and Siberia. Others left voluntarily, attracted by promises of a better life. Still others felt that by resettling in remote regions they could perhaps escape persecution by the secret police. Nowadays, the planned population shift is executed by the Comsomol (Young Communist League), "Prof-soyuz" (trade unions), "Oblono" (department of people's education) and other communist-front organizations.

To illustrate a few cases known to me: A young Ukrainian girl who had just been graduated from a Teachers College applied for assignment to a Kiev Secondary School as a German-language in-

structor. She was told there were no vacancies in the Kiev "Oblono" district. This was quite true. If there are any vacancies, and there are hundreds (if not thousands) every year, Russian teachers are brought up to fill the vacant posts. Since no one is allowed to remain unemployed in the Soviet Union—there is even a law against "tuneyadtsy," i. e., people who refuse to do physical work—the young woman was offered a "temporary job" as a fitter at the Kiev Automobile Factory. If she refused, she would be expelled from the Comsomol and blackballed as a "tuneyadets," to face legal charges in court. If she agreed, she could work at the factory till doomsday. Therefore, she accepted an assignment to teach the German language at the Secondary School in Semipalatinsk, on the border of Kazakhstan and Central Siberia. She was engaged to be married to a young architect, who was also faced with the same kind of employment problem. He elected to accompany her to the distant Siberian town, where he obtained an important post as Assistant Director of the Town Construction Planning Commission.

The parents of the girl and of her fiance also applied for resettlement to Kazakhstan. Back in Kiev, they lived in cramped one-room flats, with a common toilet and kitchen facilities shared by five or six families. In Semipalatinsk, they were given comfortable three room apartments in new blocks of apartment houses on the city's outskirts, loans for new furniture and steady employment. Russians from Tambov Oblast moved into their vacated rooms in Kiev.

Another case I know of concerns a river-barge dispatcher at the Kiev Dnieper Waterway Administration. He was a young man, married, and father of two. He was quite efficient, but had his human faults. He was in love with another woman and used to drink excessively. He was especially fond of "Pertsovka," a sharp vodka seasoned by throat-burning peppers. Because of his illicit love affair, he was late or absent from his job on a few occasions. At other times, he was quite drunk and made mistakes.

In Stalin's day, he would have been tried for "criminal negligence" and "deliberate wrecking," sentenced to slave-labor in Siberia, and hustled off to his doom. Khrushchev's regime is much subtler, if not less deadly, in this respect. The young man was called on the carpet by his "*natshalnik*" (chief) and advised that he had broken nine different laws against "*progul*" (absenteeism), alcoholism, negligence, disturbance of work discipline, etc. If tried on all these charges, he could be sentenced to a total of 15 years in jail. But the "*natshalnik*," a Russian, suggested there was a way out. "You are a young man, you can still make amends and correct your despicable behavior. Think of your wife and children. Do it for them.

Do you want your two boys to grow up, with their father a common criminal in prison?"

The dispatcher, now sobered up, begged his chief to help him. The boss suggested a "quickie transfer" to the Baikal-Yakutsk-Lena waterway system administration in Eastern Siberia, which was developing fast and needed qualified personnel. The whole family left Kiev for Irkutsk, where a job was waiting for the man.

Today, there are close to a million Ukrainians in Kazakhstan another million in Kirghizia, Uzbekistan and Turkestan, half a million each in the basins of the Kuban, Terek and Ural Rivers, at least two million in Siberia, and smaller groups all over the Soviet Union, from Kamchatka to Klaipeda.

Indeed, thanks to the Moscow-directed population shift program, there is some justification for all the movies being dubbed in the Russian language at our studios. After all, since the urban populace speaks Russian in eight cases out of ten, why give them old-style Ukrainian? After my arrival in the free Western world, I was amazed to hear that people were not aware of the changes in the Soviet Union. They still think in terms of the Stalin era. Those times are gone, perhaps forever. True, people still disappear, and the secret police have not forgotten the various methods of brainwashing a prisoner and making him confess to anything.

But Khrushchev's methods are both subtler and more dangerous than Stalin's. Deportations, massacres and brutal reprisals of the Stalin era were not efficient, from Moscow's point of view. They necessitated the stationing of large security police forces, the lowering of industrial and agricultural efficiency, and generated general fear, panic and seething discontent. Today's methods do not make people happy either, but they are more efficient, and hence more dangerous.

A realistic picture of Ukraine in 1963 would write some things down in the debit rubric, and some in the credit column of the Soviet-domination ledger. The Soviets must be credited with industrialization, technological and scientific education, and a general development of Ukrainian ports, waterways, railroads and highways. Of course, their motives have been selfish all along the line. Ukraine is the richest non-Russian colony of the Moscow empire. Its development and industrialization help the USSR to produce rockets, missiles, nuclear weapons, armaments for export to foreign countries, steel for warships and oil pipelines, and a variety of other products. Moscow could not exist without Ukrainian wheat and corn, iron ore and coal, its ship-building industry, locomotive works, tractor plants, meat, eggs, butter, milk and fruits.

Since general development, industrialization and intensive education is always accompanied by high-pressure Russification (all technical colleges and engineering institutes in Ukraine lecture in Russian only, although token lip service is paid to something called—by Russians with a morbid sense of humor—Ukrainian culture), and millions of Russians are moved in to replace the outgoing Ukrainians, the current state of affairs can be best described as a period of consolidation of Moscow's considerable postwar gains, before pushing ahead with the final "integration" of Ukraine into "Greater Russia."

Compared to any time in the past, after the 1917 Soviet Revolution and the 1918-1921 Civil War, there is more prosperity in Ukraine than ever before. By Western standards—which amazed me at first, being unused to the glut of goods, products and services on this side of the Iron Curtain—the department stores, cooperative markets and grocery shops in Ukrainian towns and cities lack the basic minimum of products. And in village stores, one can get only size-eleven shoes of a certain color, only a certain type of sewing needles and only white thread, for instance. To obtain size-ten shoes, a bigger needle, or black thread, the peasant must travel to other villages, or visit a bigger town. But even this is astounding progress. For 45 years, Soviet shops were empty and devoid even of old wrapping paper, which was used by the managers to roll their evil-smelling *makhorka* cigarettes. By Soviet standards, the Ukrainian shops and markets are now a horn of plenty. Peasants no longer buy whatever is offered, but only whatever they need. In former years, they bought things they had no need of, like skis on the snowless Black Sea shore, or electric light bulbs in villages which had no electricity. Everything a shop had to sell was snapped up, whether the consumer needed it or not, for the simple reason that there was a perennial shortage of goods. Bulbs could be changed for candles in the cities, while skis could be sold at a profit in northern regions, to buy old rubber tires (for shoe-sole repair) in return.

Now things are quite different. There are still shortages, to be sure, otherwise I would not have been able to sell stolen film on the black market. But, from the material point of view, the farmers and city-dwellers fare much better than before. Now that their bellies are filled with bread, salt pork, herrings and potatoes, which are cheap and plentiful, and their shoulders covered with Soviet-type coats (padded shoulders, wide sleeves, five-inch lapels), the people begin to worry about the spiritual desert they live in. There are numerous indications that Ukrainian intellectuals are dissatisfied and disenchanted. This goes even for army officers and communist party

members. Man does not live by bread alone, and they want something more out of life than food, clothes and a roof over their heads.

The failure of the regime to provide a satisfactory *raison d'être* for the intellectuals (the masses do not worry about such things, being satisfied as long as they are well-fed, dressed, warm and dry), is Debit Entry Number One. Other bad marks on the ledger of the Soviet Russian administration in Ukraine must be given for agricultural inefficiency, administrative corruption, juvenile delinquency, crime and rackets.

Ukraine is the granary and meat packing plant of the Soviet Union, not because of Soviet collective agricultural methods, but despite them. It still produces less wheat, meat, fruits, vegetables, eggs and milk now, despite 45 years of Soviet modernization, mechanization, scientific innovation and "progressive" collectivization, than the same cultivated areas produced back in 1912, before the First World War.

The Ukrainian farmer is very efficient and works hard. But his heart is not in his work. There is ample proof of it year after year, during harvest and marketing periods. The average Ukrainian farmer reaps more from his small half-acre *uchastok* than the *kolkhoz* collects from ten acres of collective ground. The *kolkhoz* has tractors, combines, trucks, fertilizers, ample manpower, trained agronomists and agricultural-engineering graduates. The farmer can work on his small half-acre (that's the maximum allowed, and even this is being cut down now) only with his own hands. He is permitted to plant fruit trees, vegetables, sunflowers, watermelons and corn—allegedly for his family's private use—on the narrow slice of ground between his front porch and the wooden picket fence along the main village street. He is also allowed to keep one cow, up to ten chickens, one calf and two pigs for private use. He and his wife can devote themselves to their private livestock and gardens only after working 10 to 12 hours in the *kolkhoz* fields, orchards, cattle farms and piggeries. But the miracle is that Ukrainian farmers produce more foodstuffs out of their private, non-mechanized and unscientifically cultivated half-acre parcels of ground than the *kolkhoz* and *sov-khoz* collectives deliver all told to the state. Had there been a real land reform in Ukraine, and had the land—instead of being stolen by the communistic state—been divided among the peasants, as the Bolsheviks promised in 1917, I am sure Ukraine would have been the richest country on earth—what with its agricultural, industrial, mineral, seaport, river and manpower potential; perhaps richer even than the United States.

Before I was graduated from the Institute of Film Production in Kiev (class of 1951), I tried to study law. But I gave it up after a year, because only idiots or criminals can be lawyers under the Soviet system, which denies the accused prisoner basic human rights. But while I studied at the Law Faculty of Kiev University, we were told by our instructors that crime, prostitution and juvenile delinquency are direct results of the rotten capitalistic system. It was proved to us scientifically and dialectically that criminals are not born, but made. It was therefore axiomatic that rotten social, moral and economic conditions in the reactionary bourgeois countries contributed to a rising crime rate. It was equally obvious that a pure socialist society, such as was being developed in the Soviet Union, would not suffer from the evils of capitalism, and there would therefore be no reasons whatever for crime, prostitution or delinquency. It was so logical that I myself believed it, until the day I saw pimps offering teen-aged prostitutes to passersby on Khreshchatyk, Kiev's main thoroughfare.

Today, I can only laugh at my naivete. The general crime and juvenile delinquency rate in the Soviet Union is unequalled anywhere else in the world, not even in New York's Central Park, or the dark alleys of Algier's Casbah. The most crime-ridden city in the Soviet Union is Moscow, followed by Kiev, Odessa, Rostov, Tbilisi, Baku, Kishinev and Sverdlovsk in that order. Leningrad, Riga, Minsk, Tashkent and Lviv complain of crime, too, but are relatively tame by comparison.

Analysis of crime in Soviet-ruled Ukraine must first consider the difference between the hoodlums of Kiev and Odessa. The Odessa underworld is ruled by Russian gangsters, the notorious "Odeskiye Blatniye" mobs, which terrorize even the security police with their nail-studded sticks and sharp razor blades cunningly hidden between the fingers of their hands. The Kiev gangsters are mostly Ukrainians and call themselves "Dniprovska Holytba." There is no love lost between the Odessa and Kiev gangs, and regular battles are being fought for disputed territory, such as the new Kakhovka car trailer park.

Kakhovka on the Dnieper River is now being developed as a major tourist center. Its location on the river, astride the main tourist route to the Crimea and the Black Sea, is indeed magnificent. A new four-lane highway, connecting Kiev with Simferopol and Yalta, was completed last year. Foreign tourists are encouraged to stay overnight at the Kakhovka motor camp and continue their journey south the next day.

A narrower two-lane road branches out of the main highway to link up with the Nikolayev-Odessa road network. The Odessa underworld controls the prostitutes, pimps, pickpockets, thieves, blackmarketeers and speculators who prey on the Crimean tourist trade. From April through September the Crimea is a virtual gold mine to the underworld.

The Odessa gangs also wage a ruthless campaign against the Rostov underworld ("Rostovskiye Felony") which exercises control over the Caucasus Gold Coast Strip (Sochi-Gagry-Suhumi). But when Kakhovka became a major tourist attraction, the Kiev mobsters decided to muscle in. For two years bloody battles were fought with guns, knives, razors and deadly piano wire, until an uneasy truce was negotiated between the gangs. The Odessa gangs and their subsidiaries control the entire Black Sea coast, from the Danube east to the Crimea, including the Simferopol-Yalta-Kerch triangle. The Don River, the Azov Sea and Caucasus coast are ruled by the Rostov mobs. Farther east, the vicious Saratov gangs operate a tight crime syndicate along the Volga River and the Caspian Sea. Sverdlovsk mobs control the Ural and Western Siberia.

The Kiev underworld, on the other hand, operates in the north-to-south direction, its control being acknowledged all along the Dnieper River, from Smolensk to Nikolayev. If a passenger on one of the river boats has his pockets picked, or misses a valuable watch, the man to see is not Colonel Ivan Fedotov, the police (people's militia) commissioner in Kiev, but Vaska Horbaty (Hunchback Vasya), who runs the Kiev underworld's ransom and pay-off rackets.

I knew Vaska for some years, ever since my wallet was stolen at the Komsomolskaya bus stop, back in 1957. I did not mind losing the money so much as missing the only pictures of my parents and sisters, who were killed by Nazi murder squads during the German occupation in World War II.

I kept them in my wallet and cried with bitter tears when I discovered it was stolen from my trouser pocket while waiting for the bus to the Film Studios. I learned later that the thieves arranged what they called "toltsbok" (artificial pushing), which disorganizes the queue of waiting passengers and pick their pockets while they mill around in utter confusion. I told my boss of the theft, and asked for a day off to contact the "Ugrozysk" (Ugolovny Rozysk—Criminal Investigation) section of the police. They owed us some favors, especially after we had given them a publicity boost by filming their new prowling cars in action for one of our documentaries, titled "Grazhdane, mozhete spat spokojno" (Citizens, You Can Sleep Peacefully). With

their aid, I hoped to recover my late parents' photos. The money I was willing to give up as lost.

My boss heard me out and thought for a while. "I will give you a day off, but if you want to get the photos back, don't go to the cops. All they know is to arrest some harmless drunks. The wallet business looks to me like a professional job. It's best to contact Vaska Horbaty. He will help you, for a price."

He gave me the address; I found Vaska, paid him the required ransom, and got back the photos. Later on, I was able to arrange similar deals on behalf of friends. It was from Vaska—who had top contacts at the police headquarters as well—that I gained an insight into the operations of the Kiev and Odessa underworlds. There is one particular gang, known as "Zhelyazki," which specializes in thefts and robberies from railroad trains. The armed railway guards have orders to shoot first and ask questions later, but they fear the tough "Zhelyazki" gangsters, and prefer to look the other way while sealed boxcars are emptied of valuable cargo and mail vans are broken into and robbed.

All this crime is accepted as a fact of life by the people of Ukraine. They do not expect anything else from Soviet law-enforcement methods. The Odessa gangs specialize in smuggling narcotics (via foreign seamen) into the USSR, waterfront prostitution, tourist gold-and-currency deals, and armed robberies. In Kiev, narcotics are seldom used, and there are relatively few drug addicts, compared to Moscow or Odessa. But prostitution flourishes as never before. Even Western psychologists and sociologists assume that women are forced into prostitution by social and economic conditions. Only a small percentage of women would voluntarily choose it as their way of life. Unemployment and lack of education are given by experts as the two main reasons for the growth of prostitution. That is certainly not true in Soviet-ruled Ukraine and other parts of the USSR.

Unemployment is prohibited by law, and there is always work for unemployed persons in the "virgin lands" of Kazakhstan and Siberia. Education is both free and universal, at least up to the eighth grade of secondary school. While no one can expect Western standards of living, no one has to starve either, be homeless or chronically unemployed. In that case, there should not be a single prostitute, beggar or panhandler in the Soviet Union.

Alas, the reality is different. Please take a stroll with me along the tree-lined streets of beautiful ancient-new Kiev on a warm summer evening. Most churches have been seized by the Soviets and either razed to make room for ugly blocks of sugar-cube apartment buildings or turned into sports clubs, libraries and research institutes.

The same thing happened to the Jewish synagogues. But the few churches still open are thronged with believers. A crowd of hideously mutilated invalids and beggars blocks the approach to the wide staircase in front of the church. In pitiful voices they beg for a few kopeks. There is a law against begging and panhandling. According to regulations, the two burly militia sergeants on patrol across the street, should have summoned a prison-service truck and rounded up all the beggars who are a real eyesore, disfiguring a genuine historical monument.

But they ignore the outcasts and pointedly look the other way, to crack down on some careless driver or harmless drunk. Only a foreigner would wonder why. Any Kievlanin (i.e. native of Kiev) knows that most of the beggars are not real cripples but crooks and veteran members of the beggars' syndicate, affiliated with the Kiev underworld.

If the police start any trouble, the two sergeants would be hunted down and carved up with razors until their own mothers would not be able to identify them at the morgue. And the churchgoers give alms, some out of sheer pity, but most out of fear. The professional beggars keep red or violet ink in small bottles hidden beneath their vermin-infested rags. If people ignore their pleas and do not throw a few coins into the boxes, a woman's coat, or a man's best suit is splashed with the indelible ink and ruined. We continue strolling down the Kotovsky Boulevard, named after a communist partisan leader of the 1917 Revolution. Multi-colored lights of pleasure boats, passenger steamers, ferries and riverside cafes glitter along the Dnieper. Kiev is built on the high Western bank (the righthand one) of the Dnieper. The left, eastern bank is low and flat. Suburbs, "rabochi poselok" (barracks-like housing for workers), small villas, and endless rows of shacks, huts and makeshift cabins stretch for miles off the eastern bank. The Kiev City Council has built a large Park of Culture and Relaxation across the river. But only people from the eastbank suburbs frequent it, and not even they at night. Cars and buses are moving down the Pervomaisky Prospekt, towards the new Panoramic Movie Theater, featuring the film based on Lesya Ukrainka's "Song of the Forest." We board a bus, but step down after a few stops and cross Shchors Square towards Derzhinsky Boulevard. This avenue, as well as mainline Khreshshatyk, are filled with elegant women who slowly stroll up and down, looking for single men whom they accost in Russian slang: "Pogulayem, golubchik?" (Let's have some fun, my dove?).

Prostitution is a criminal offense in the Soviet Union, but no militiamen were in evidence. They knew that pimps lurked in the

shadows, ready to slash out with razors if any attempt is made to crack down on their lucrative racket. Some police sergeants in charge of an "uchastok" (patrol district) are regularly paid off by the vice syndicates.

Much worse is the situation in front of Kiev's newest and biggest luxury hotel. The 16-story, 800-room Hotel Moskva is located smack in the middle of a tree-lined square, overlooking the river and the west-bank boulevards. Young school-age girls loiter in front of the hotel, offering everything—including themselves—for a few foreign-made nylon stockings, orlon sweaters or chewing gum. The illicit love is consummated right in the square below the hotel, amidst the shrubbery and trees. Is this the "progressive" education of Soviet youth?

Some things I saw sickened me far more than torture, prisons or slave labor. The Soviet Union is undergoing a veritable plague of juvenile delinquency, teen-age prostitution, crime and rackets in schools and universities, because the young boys and girls instinctively feel their lives are empty and devoid of all content.

But "holigany" (juvenile delinquents) and "ugolovniki" (hardened criminals) enjoy comparative freedom and immunity from prosecution. Even if arrested and brought to trial, they receive relatively light sentences, with the right of appeal, amnesty, pardon and parole. If sent to corrective labor camps, they are appointed to senior posts, to live like parasitic leeches off the political or economic crime convicts.

There are fewer convicted "politicals" now than at any previous time in Soviet history, though still more than under the Czars. But all kinds of persecutions and molestations are being carried out under the common heading of "Economic Offense Against the State" for which the death sentence is mandatory. For reasons which are both objective and subjective, Ukraine has drawn most of the "economic crime" trials, out of all proportion to its size and territory.

The objective reasons are twofold. First of all, many (if not most) inhabitants of Ukraine, especially Ukrainians, Jews and Poles, hate the Moscow regime, despise communism and resent Soviet rule. They do not regard stealing from the state as a crime (I myself did not regard stealing film as a crime, albeit well aware of the dangers if caught), and in many cases rationalize theft of money, building materials, foodstuffs, textiles etc. as a patriotic act of sabotage against the Kremlin tyrants.

Another reason is that Ukraine is extremely well-developed commercially, industrially and agriculturally, as well as communications-wise. There is a lot to steal from, and easily-accessible big-city mar-

kets mean that everything can be sold in a hurry. The assistant manager of the Lena Gold Mines in Northeastern Siberia may be able to steal five truckloads of gold. But how will he get it out of the wilderness, and how will he sell the "hot" stuff?

The subjective reasons are evident as well. It seems stupid to shoot a man for keeping a few pounds sterling in foreign notes in his prayer book. In any other country, this would be no offense at all. Even in countries with foreign currency controls, only a token fine would be imposed by the court for keeping "valuta."

But if the man's name happens to be Isaac Abramovich Izakson, it's a good chance to kill several birds with one stone—crack down on Jews, and terrorize them, whip up popular anti-Semitism, and divert the people's anger and righteous indignation from the arch-criminals in the Kremlin to the small-fry offenders in Kiev. In case newspaper readers and radio listeners miss the point, the stories stress that the prayer book in which foreign money bills were found was a Hebrew-language edition of the Jewish Bible. The same methods are utilized against Ukrainians suspected of nationalist sentiments. Filling a beer stein with foam instead of beer is a racket well known to the habitués of German "Bierstuben," English pubs and U.S. bars. A beer-filled stein without its crown of foam, looks and feels unappetizing, but a shrewd barman can add so much foam per portion that he can pocket an exorbitant profit at day's end. This is no crime in the free Western world. If the customers think they are being given foam instead of beer, they will either protest in no uncertain terms, or take their business across the street to a more honest bar.

But if the manager of a Kiev riverside "Pivnaya" happens to be known as a "Ukrainian" Ukrainian—that is, he is reported by neighborhood snoops to be singing patriotic Ukrainian songs with his children, addresses his customers in "pure" Ukrainian language, and so forth—the secret police know how to handle the beer-foam business.

Thus readers of Kiev newspapers could read all about one Antin Mykhailovich Popudrenko, who "cheated honest port workers and barge stevedores" of 56,780 liters of beer (who made this calculation, and how was foam converted into liters of beer?) over a period of four years, realizing an ill-gotten profit of 39,200 new rubles, which he used to buy a private "dacha" near Kiev for his married daughter.

After this opening shot, other "revelations" followed. Popudrenko was a "kurkul" and son of a "kulak," according to the papers. Both words are deadly insults in Soviet lingo. In Western usage,

both mean a more or less prosperous farmer, and if that is a crime—why should a farmer strive to be poor rather than prosperous? In 1918 and 1919, while a young man, he was a “Petlura bandit” and committed “many crimes” against the Soviet republic. Simple arithmetic showed that this could not be true.

Popudrenko was, at the time of his arrest in 1962, 54 years old. In 1918-1919, he was about ten years old, hardly the age for Civil War fighting! During World War II and the German occupation, he collaborated with the Nazis, according to the press reports. About that, I can't say. Perhaps true, perhaps not. Knowing Soviet propaganda at first hand, I would not be surprised if “Nazi collaborator” Popudrenko actually served as a Red Army soldier all during the war.

After adding that the arrested “wrecker, thief, robber and gutless slime” Popudrenko maintained postwar contacts with “bourgeois nationalist fascist” elements, the papers praised the police for catching him red-handed. Actually, Popudrenko was denounced by one of his waitresses who solicited customers for a private call-girl racket and who wanted to be cut in on the beer-foam deal as well.

The economic system in the Soviet Union is based on several rather stupid misconceptions of day-dreaming intellectuals of pre-revolutionary days. They reasoned that since money is the root of all evil, profit must be evil too. Ergo, private profit by individuals is a crime. As applied to present-day Ukraine, such economic theories are not only idiotic, but ridiculous as well. On March 12, 1962, I went with a newsreel camera team to shoot a short documentary on the festive opening of the Cherkassky Synthetic Fiber Combine, at Cherkassy on the Dnieper River.

This was one of the biggest textile plants in the USSR, and the ceremony was attended by Peter Rozenko (Deputy “Prime Minister” of Ukraine and Chief of the State Planning Commission) and Alexander Kazanets (Number Two man in the Ukrainian communist hierarchy).

We newsreel operators were shown everything there was to see. The huge combine consisted of a dozen plants. “The trunks of trees from the Carpathian Mountains and corn stalks from the steppes of Kremenchuh will be fed into one end, and ready-made men's suits, women's dresses, children's jackets, officer's overcoats, naval “Bush-lat” bluejackets and army uniforms will come out at the other end the Executive Director explained with pardonable pride, “and all machinery was produced in the Soviet Union...”

This was not quite true. I myself saw machinery bearing Czechoslovak and East German trade marks. But who was to argue about such things in a country which sends rockets to the moon?

We made quite a good newsreel (in Russian, of course, since all speeches were in that language, too), full of pep-talk propaganda, and I had all but forgotten about the "wonder plant" at Cherkassy when about seven months later I read in the papers about the trial of the Assistant Production Manager and three members of his staff. I myself feel they were not guilty. What happened was the factory produced 120,000 men's suits and could not ship them as planned to department stores, because the suits lacked buttons. In any free economy, buttons would have been no problem. But the Cherkassy plant had to wait until buttons arrived from Ivano-Frankovsk (Stanislaviv) in Western Ukraine. When the buttons finally arrived, they were white, red, yellow, and orange-colored, but not a single black button suitable for men's suits. Work at the Cherkassy plant was halted indefinitely all along the production line.

But the plant had its annual quota to fulfill, and the Executive Director, a Russian, ordered his Production Manager, a Ukrainian, to "get black buttons, no matter how." The Production Manager hired a special trouble shooter, one Grigori Podolsky (nationality unspecified), to travel to Ivano-Frankovsk and make a deal with the manager of the Karl Marx Button and Belt Factory. He would let him have 750 suits, worth about 200,000 rubles, in exchange for 3,000,000 black buttons of the necessary sizes.

The Stanislaviv people agreed at once. For them, 750 men's suits represented a veritable fortune in negotiable securities. But since their small factory could not turn out three million buttons within the time specified, they subleased portions of the deal to other enterprises.

Well, to cut a long story short, when the police rounded up the entire "gang," they left the Russian Executive Director alone. But three Jews, two Ukrainians and one Pole were sentenced to death for "speculating in buttons." If this had happened in any free foreign country, they would have been rewarded and promoted for showing business-like initiative, instead of being executed on trumped-up charges of speculation.

I have dealt at length with crime, rackets, vice and corruption not only because they are typical of the Soviet regime, but because the Soviet Russian system of administration, legal procedure and law-enforcement punishment is grotesque. Sending a man to certain death in the icy wastes of the Far North because he served one inch more of beer-foam than prescribed by regulations, or shooting efficient businessmen because they exchanged men's suits for buttons, and raked in some commission profit on the side, is reminiscent of feudal Yemen or Saudi Arabia, where a thief's hand is cut off,

a liar's tongue torn out, and a man has his eyes gouged out if he looks at another man's harem.

Not even the cruel Czarist officials in reactionary Imperial Russia were as brutally stupid as Moscow's "gauleiters" in Ukraine. I have tried to present an objective, true and accurate picture of life in Ukraine, in 1962-1963.

I hope my predictions won't come true, but I fear that at least four non-Russian Soviet nationalities—Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Jews, and Tartars—face cultural and national annihilation. Physically, they won't be harmed. In fact, their material conditions and living standards may even improve.

The commissars are succeeding where the Czars have failed. And one can even understand—if not sympathize with—the geopolitical motives of Moscow's Russification policy. But at a time when the Soviet regime sets itself up as the champion of "progress" and "anti-colonialist liberation," Moscow's brutal oppression, feudal-era punishments, cultural annihilation of minorities, resettlement of ethnic groups, and large-scale falsification of history, coupled with administrative and moral corruption, flourishing crime and rackets, are themselves fascist and reactionary.

Having escaped from the Soviet Union, I am convinced that all truly progressive revolutionaries and advocates of progress must fight colonialism, fascism and reaction, not only in some remote Angola or North Borneo, but in the Soviet Russian Empire, which has already gobbled up one-sixth of the globe, and threatens to swallow the rest.
