

We can't *possibly* know everything we *should* know through our own first-person research...and that truth leads to the next episode for us as key decision makers in this Research-Wisdom-Action series. Now that key truth is called by some experts as our collective need for *facts taken on trust*—but that could also be called *opinions taken on trust*. That can especially be the case in our era's supercharged, hyper-political climate where even the most basic facts obvious to reasonable people are uprooted with outrageous new claims. Unfortunately, many cave in to that new pressure due to expected social consequences like blacklisting or career blockage. But sadly, others quickly *join in* due to new political advantage or career advancement or improved social leverage. And sometimes those upsides or downsides are huge!

Here's a giant case of that...a fascinating but tangled story from a century ago, a story that tells us so much about *facts taken on trust* and the truth-telling reliability of key sources and their sponsors and advocates. So. There was a very famous journalist in England throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the name of Malcolm Muggeridge. The Muggeridge story actually starts with his father, H.T. Muggeridge, who was a Member of Parliament and a long-time member of the Fabians—meaning he was an “official” socialist.

True to his father's principles, Muggeridge's politics in the 1920s were with the Revolutionary Communists in the USSR—the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. Accordingly, he was compelled to move to Russia as a freelance journalist to experience the enticing new movement being led by Joseph Stalin in the early 1930s. Right off the bat, Muggeridge and his wife Kitty were sponsored in their move by none other than Sidney Webb, a leading socialist in England and co-founder of the London School of Economics.

Trouble was, the Malcolm Muggeridge who arrived in Moscow was a journalist of the old school, seeking to report the actual, verified truth, and that in the midst of chaos and murkiness in the USSR, and, frankly, also fear, intimidation, lies, deceit—and not least, the routine disappearance of many Soviet citizens to labor camps or an early grave. Even Sidney Webb's wife Beatrice informed Malcolm before he left: *it's true...people disappear in Russia!* But that's not all: Stalin and his socialist henchmen with their diabolical worldview engineered the systematic starvation of many millions of Ukrainians. Welcome to the future...

Here's what developed. Muggeridge soon spotted how the socialist intellectuals and budding ideologues both inside and outside the Soviet Union were quite willingly and enthusiastically sucked into embracing and executing the truly dastardly deeds ordained and engineered by the Soviet elites and bureaucracy.

Muggeridge was attached to the famous newspaper *The Manchester Guardian*. While he moved with relative ease in the USSR, every one of his newspaper reports was subject to Soviet censors. One said to him, “*You can't say that because it's true.*” Planned disinformation abounded. Here's one example Muggeridge noted: “When the Germans occupied Kiev in the 1939-45 war they got hold of a[n official Soviet agricultural] Five-Year Plan, showing what had been really produced and where. Needless to say, it was quite different from the published figures.” Here's another quote about deceit: “...a statistic planted, and makes its appearance in tables, graphs, learned discourses, becoming part of the world's wisdom. In the beginning was the Lie, and the Lie was made news and dwelt among us, graceless and false.”

In due time, Muggeridge slyly took an unauthorized trip to the Ukraine. What he saw there was deeply shocking. So...Muggeridge went to work at his craft of reporting. But this time, he didn't submit his work to the Soviet censors. Instead, Muggeridge sent his written summary of the massive Soviet-engineered starvation in secret...by official diplomatic courier. The result? On May 14, 1932, *The Guardian* newspaper published Muggeridge's work with no byline—that means no authorship was attributed to his story.

Here's a glimpse of Muggeridge's words. The famine was “planned and deliberate; not due to any natural catastrophe like failure of rain or cyclone or flooding. An administrative famine brought about by the forced collectivization of agriculture...abandoned villages, the absence of livestock, neglected fields; everywhere famished, frightened people...One particularly remarkable scene I stumbled on...peasants with their hands tied behind them being loaded into cattle trucks at gun-point.” Muggeridge wrote that it was “more than famine...but a state of war, a military occupation.” And here's what he wrote in his diary:

“Whatever else I may do or think in the future, I must never pretend that I haven’t seen this. Ideas will come and go; but this is more than an idea. It is peasants kneeling down in the snow and asking for bread.” Amazingly, *The Guardian* newspaper simultaneously published reporting about some of Hitler’s similarly-heinous National Socialist activities, this at a time when very few newspapers doing so. Upon reflection, it’s pretty reasonable to say this: in the entire history of journalism, these reports published by *The Guardian* could easily be counted as the highest pinnacle.

Predictably, the articles were met with comprehensive condemnation by armchair socialists, communists, ideologues, intellectuals, academics, and religious leaders...you know, the people who were lauding what was being called the “Soviet experiment.” Yeah, it was an experiment all right...a vicious, cruel experiment.

But the most prominent and influential opponent to what Muggeridge reported was Walter Duranty, the famous correspondent to the Soviet Union for *The New York Times*. These two men knew each other well. Duranty had virtually unlimited access to the Soviet leaders and elite, and Duranty worked to perpetuate his privileges for many years by writing glowing reports about supposed Soviet successes.

Before Muggeridge’s report (and that alongside the reporting of journalist Gareth Jones), Duranty famously reported that “there is no famine or actual starvation nor is there likely to be” and “any report of a famine in Russia is today an exaggeration or malignant propaganda.” Hard as it is to fathom, Duranty was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for *his* reporting. And Duranty maintained his Soviet-favoring posture for many years. When all was said and done, Muggeridge simply called Duranty “the greatest liar I ever knew.”

This significant famine Muggeridge witnessed has several names like the Great Famine and the Terror-Famine. In 2003, 25 nations expressed themselves through a United Nations document: “In the former Soviet Union millions of men, women and children fell victims to the cruel actions and policies of the totalitarian regime. The Great Famine of 1932–1933 in Ukraine (Holodomor), which took from 7 million to 10 million innocent lives and became a national tragedy for the Ukrainian people. ... [A]s a result of civil war and forced collectivization, leaving deep scars in the consciousness of future generations. ... [W]e deplore the acts and policies that brought about mass starvation and death of millions of people.”

Likewise, *The New York Times* itself appointed a Russian-history expert to revisit the awarding of the Pulitzer to Duranty and the *Times*. He found Duranty’s work deficient, saying that, “For the sake of the *New York Times*’ honor, they should take the prize away.” The *NYT*’s publisher *himself* piled on, saying that Duranty’s work was “slovenly” and said it “should have been recognized for what it was by his editors and by his Pulitzer judges seven decades ago.” Sadly, the Pulitzer’s Board declined to revoke the award.

But many have concluded that real, enduring damage had been done long before. Famously, Sally Taylor’s biography of Walter Duranty (titled *Stalin’s Apologist*) takes the position that Duranty’s reporting was significant to President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s decision to grant official recognition to the USSR in 1933.

But, wait, was that a foregone conclusion? Roosevelt’s decision occurred *after both* Duranty’s reporting and Muggeridge’s reporting! Just whose “facts were taken on trust?” Both Duranty’s and Muggeridge’s take on the Ukrainian situation were well-known. It’s just that Duranty’s views were published by *The New York Times*; embraced by American elites; anointed with the Pulitzer Prize; and then—*of course*—officially recognized by Roosevelt and his Administration. Unsurprisingly, then, in 1934 the USSR was admitted into the League of Nations, the predecessor to the UN. All this was supported by supposed *facts taken on trust* from Walter Duranty. And then, *then* Stalin and the USSR rolled on for decades...purging their enemies...brutally controlling nations in Eastern Europe...routinely oppressing detractors in concentration camps.

Yes, sadly, “facts taken on trust.” Friends, we simply can’t know everything, we must rely on “facts” and reports from others. But just how strong is our discernment of the truly correct *facts taken on trust*. 1 John 4:1 (ESV): “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.” From governments to media to pulpits to colleagues, do we discern *well*? Yeah, just how well do we *routinely* discern between competing facts?

