

Little Red Sweden in Ukraine – the 1930s Comintern project in Gammalsvenskby

Soon the brothers will see the East in the Gold

Swedish Communist Party's slogan
May Day 1931

ANDREJ KOTLIARCHUK

The history of Gammalsvenskby offers a unique opportunity to investigate totalitarian political techniques in the twentieth century. The Swedish agricultural colony on the bank of the river Dnipro, not far from its fall into the Black Sea, is the only Scandinavian settlement in Eurasia. The church of Gammalsvenskby was the first Lutheran parish in the Azov and Black Sea territories. It functioned from 1782 to 1929. They owned the plots they cultivated and as foreign colonists they had a considerable degree of self-government in the Russian Empire and Soviet Ukraine.¹

Recent research shows that the colonists of Gammalsvenskby had a high degree of ethnic self-consciousness. They considered themselves Swedes and spoke Swedish fluently in its dialect and standard form.² Since the middle of the nineteenth century the inhabitants of the village were in continuous contact with the Kingdom of Sweden and ethnic Swedes of the Grand Duchy of Finland. A number of Swedish cultural institutions (e.g., school, new church, library and choir) were erected or founded thanks to

¹ Svetlana Bobyleva, "Shvedy i gosudarstvennaia vlast Ukrainy," in *Voprosy germanskoi istorii*, ed. Svetlana Bobyleva (Dnepropetrovsk: Porogi, 2008), 247–268.

² Anton Karlgren, *Gammalsvenskby: land och folk, serie: svenska landsmål och svenskt folkliv* (Uppsala, 1929); Alexander Mankov, "Selo Staroshvedskoe (Gammalsvenskby) i ego dialekt. Rezultaty issledovaniia 2004–2006 gg.," in *Shvedy: sushchnost i metamorfozy identichnosti*, ed. Tamara Torstendahl-Salycheva (Moskva: RGGU, 2008), 294–314.

the Scandinavian aid given to the village. As a consequence the colonists received “an inoculation” of modern Swedish nationalism.³

During the first half of the twentieth century, this tiny Swedish community became the subject of a series of social experiments conducted by different political regimes. Their aim was to change the collective identity of the colonists and make them to the new authorities. Under the guidance of the Ukrainian *Tsentralnyi Komitet natsionalnykh menshyn* (TsKNM) a policy of “indigenization” was conducted between 1923 and 1929 with the aim of transforming the former foreign colonists of the Russian Empire into a loyal ethnic minority of Soviet Ukraine.⁴ After virtually the whole village (888 persons) had moved to their historic fatherland under the control of the “Gammalsvenskbykommittén” (Old-Swedish Village Committee) that had been formed in Sweden, a new large-scale experiment was undertaken between 1929 and 1938. The aim of this experiment was to fully integrate the “archaic” Ukrainian Swedes into the modern Swedish society by transforming them into successful Swedish farmers. The emigrants were denied a separate settlement in Sweden and the “Old Swedes” were spread all over the country to undergo “instruction in the Swedish norms of economic and every day activities.”⁵ Inspectors appointed by the Committee monitored all aspects of the integration of the “lost generation” into the Swedish society. The colonists who disagreed with this policy (around 265 persons) returned to the USSR in 1930–1931. There, in so-called Röd Svenskby (Red Swedish Village), an experiment was launched which aimed to create the first Swedish *kolkhoz* and village council in the USSR. It was conducted under the patronage of the Comintern and supervision of Swedish Communists and lasted for five years. This chapter constitutes the first scientific account of this short-lived and ill-fated endeavor.

³ Piotr Wawrzeniuk, “En resande i svenskhet. Herman Vendell i Gammalsvenskby 1881,” *Personhistorisk tidskrift* 2009:2, 149–164; Tatiana Shrader, “Ocherki zhizni shvedskikh kolonistov v Rossii 19 veka,” in *Skandinavskie chteniia* 2006 (St Petersburg: Nauka, 2008), 229–253.

⁴ About the politics of indigenization see: Harold R. Weinstein, “Language and Education in the Soviet Ukraine,” *Slavonic Year Book* 1 (1941): 124–148; James E. Mace, *Communism and the dilemmas of national liberation: national communism in Soviet Ukraine, 1918–1933* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1983), 215–217; Martin Terry, *The affirmative action empire: nations and nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

⁵ Anna Wedin, “Gammalsvenskbybornas emigration till Sverige 1929. En studie i svenskhet och etniskt ursprung,” Unpublished Bachelor Thesis in history supervised by Andrej Kotljarchuk (Södertörn University 2007), 2–23.

Sources

The protocols of the Swedish Communist Party, which are kept in *Arbetrörörelsens arkiv* (Labor Movement Archives of Sweden KOLLA), document the discussions of the party on the measures to be taken by the party in relation to the ideological work among the Ukrainian Swedes in the years 1929–1931. The relevant collection for this research is Biografica which includes biographies of the activists who worked in Gammalsvenskby. Access to the material was granted by the executive committee of the *Vänsterpartiet* (The Left Party of Sweden). At *Riksarkivet* (National Archives of Sweden), two sets of documents are particularly interesting: firstly, the materials of *Socialstyrelsen* (National Board of Health and Welfare of Sweden), which contain correspondence with the villagers, lists of the persons who returned to the USSR, documents of *Gammalsvenskbykommittén* (Old-Swedish Village Committee) and *Arbetarnas Svenskbykommitté* (Workers' Swedish Village Committee), documents from the Soviet Consulate in Stockholm; and, secondly, the archives of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden containing materials dated 1930–1933 from the Swedish Embassy in Moscow on the situation in the village, correspondence dated 1932–1933 on the question of bringing back Swedish communists and some other villagers from the USSR to Sweden, and a collection of Soviet and Swedish newspaper publications about the Old Swedes.

The archives of the Communist International at the Russian State Archive for Social and Political History include the personal files of the communists who worked in Gammalsvenskby.⁶ Thanks to the powers of attorney of the relatives residing in Sweden the author gained access to the most important part of these files where he found the file “O staroshvedskikh poseleniakh na Ukraine” (About the Swedish Settlements in Ukraine). This confidential file, which was created by the officials of the *Skandinaviska ländersekretariatet* (Secretariat for Scandinavian countries), contains different materials highlighting the Comintern's policies towards Gammalsvenskby.⁷

In the vast collection of material on the history of Gammalsvenskby kept at the State Archives of Kherson Oblast, the 1933 criminal case 287 by GPU of the Ukrainian SSR on accusing the group of the Old Swedes and Swedish communists in the organizing of mass re-emigration to Sweden is of great

⁶ RGASPI, f. 495 “Ispolnitelnyi komitet Kominterna,” 1919–1943, op. 275 “Lichnye dela. Kommunisticheskaia partiia Shvetsii” (Personal files. Communist Party of Sweden).

⁷ RGASPI, f. 495, op. 31, d. 153.

value. Based on the powers of attorney on behalf of the relatives, the author was given authorization to work on this criminal case.

The author also has used materials from the Swedish mass media, as well as central Soviet and regional Ukrainian newspapers, and in addition to that also a variety of publications and documents about the Old Swedes

Theoretical framework

By applying the thought of Michel Foucault and Alberto Melucci, the author intends to study the techniques used by the Comintern and the Soviet state to force normalization upon the population that remained in the village. Their goal was to reshape the collective identity of Ukrainian Swedes and to prevent them from offering collective resistance to this process. The techniques of forced normalization are used in a process that can be divided into three phases: conceptualization, implementation, and results. Each phase has its own specific motives and mechanisms that influence the three following dimensions: 1) the configuration of new borders (administrative and geographical, social and political, historical, cultural); 2) the new normative standard (political, social and economical, cultural and linguistic); 3) the emergence of new collective values (through propaganda, education, work practices, cultural life, compulsory political rituals and so on).

The difference between the “old” identity standard and the new requirements causes conflicts in the collective identity and brings about changes in it.⁸ The conditions of the totalitarian state intensify the technological effect by not granting the common actors any choice and making them participate in the project. According to Foucault, it is low efficient to look for the explicit logically ordered economic purposes in the activities of the authority. Each of the political regimes has their own different technologies, but only one common purpose of submission and the only one common and most popular method of violence. The format of this chapter does not make it possible to analyze more in detail all the aspects of the forced normalization. The research is focused on analyzing configuration of the new

⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); *Power, Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980); *The essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: New Press, 2003); Alberto Melucci, “The process of collective identity,” in *Social movements and culture*, under redaction, ed. Hank Johnson and Bert Klandermans (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 41–63.

borders and strategies of the collective resistance. Foucault viewed the strategies of collective resistance as the less studied part of forced normalization. Foucault notes that the resistance does not express viable alternative outside the power, but is a part of collaboration of the interaction between power and its subjects in order to function furthermore.⁹

The main political actors

The Comintern and the Swedish Communist Party

In 1926, the Comintern created a special secretariat, the Secretariat for Scandinavian countries, to facilitate communications with the Scandinavian communist parties, and to monitor, to report on and control the implementation of the resolutions of the Executive Committee of the Comintern. The Secretariat, remained active until 1935, was used to strengthen the control of the ECCI over the communist parties of Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland.¹⁰

The imposition of its power by the Comintern was one of the main reasons for the division of the Swedish Communist Party in the fall of 1929; the most serious one in the history of the movement in Sweden. The split was a catastrophe for the communists loyal to the Comintern. Hugo Sillén, who led the pro-Comintern fraction, retained only 4,000 out of the 16,000 members of the SKP. The pro-Comintern party members lost the publishing house *Frams Förlag*, the leading communist newspaper *Folkets Dagblad Politiken*, most of its syndicates, and all communist members of parliament. The majority of the party followed Karl Kilbom into a new Swedish Communist Party, independent from the Comintern.¹¹ However, with financial aid from the Comintern, the SKP could regain its base and the mass media. From 1930 the pro-Comintern faction had at its disposal the

⁹ Espen Schaanning, *Fortiden i våre hender: Foucault som vitenshåndtør*, vol. 1 (Oslo: Unipub, 2000), 357–360.

¹⁰ Lars Björlin, “För svensk arbetarklass eller sovjetisk utrikespolitik? Den kommunistiska rörelsen i Sverige och förbindelserna med Moskva 1920–1970,” in *Sovjetunionen och Norden – konflikt, kontakt, influenser*, ed. Sune Junger and Bent Jensen (Helsingfors: FHS, 1997), 214 (201–225).

¹¹ Bernt Kennerström, “Sprängningen av Sveriges Kommunistiska Parti 1929” in *Från SKP till VPK – en antologi*, ed. Sven Olsson (Lund: Zenit, 1976), 82–105; Lars Gogman, *I skuggan av Stalin. Lokala konsekvenser av 1929 års sprängning av Sveriges Kommunistiska Parti*. Unpublished MA-thesis (Stockholm University, 1991), 2–13; Jan Bolin, *Parti av ny typ?: skapandet av ett svenskt kommunistiskt parti 1917–1933* (Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 2004), 368–369.

publishing house *Arbetarkultur*; the newspapers *Ny Dag*, *Norrskensflamman* and *Kalmar-läns Tidning*; the youth periodical *Stormklockan*; women's movement magazine *Arbetar-Kvinnornas Tidning*, a magazine attached to the communist women's movement; and the theoretical magazine *Kommunistisk Tidskrift*. The association *Sovjetunionens vänner* (Friends of the Soviet Union), which was controlled by the party, published its own magazine *Sovjetnytt*.

During the New Year vacation 1930–1931, a delegation from the SKP discussed the split of the party, as well as ways of getting out of the crisis, with the Comintern leaders. Sven Linderot and Paul Thunell were the heads of the Swedish delegation.

According to the Comintern, the Swedish Communist Party acted as a Social-Democratic one, "in isolation from the masses." Work among the peasantry in Sweden had never been under the influence of the Communists. But this fact was not taken into account by the Comintern.¹² The formal promoter of the Gammalsvenskby project was Allan Walenius – the director of the Comintern library and the head of the Scandinavian section at the *Kommunisticheskii universitet nationalnykh menshinstv Zapada imeni Markhlevskogo* (Markhlevskii Communist University of the National Minorities of the West). He had nightlong discussions with the Swedish communists about the bright future of Gammalsvenskby.¹³ He was a very well educated man and one of the most influential theoreticians of communism in Scandinavia. In interwar Sweden, his articles on various issues related to socialism were published regularly.¹⁴

When the delegation returned to Sweden they brought with them a plan to make the agrarian population support the policy of the SKP:

The agrarian question has not been taken into account. The party must obtain an agrarian program, and the work among agricultural workers and small farmers should be actively pursued.¹⁵

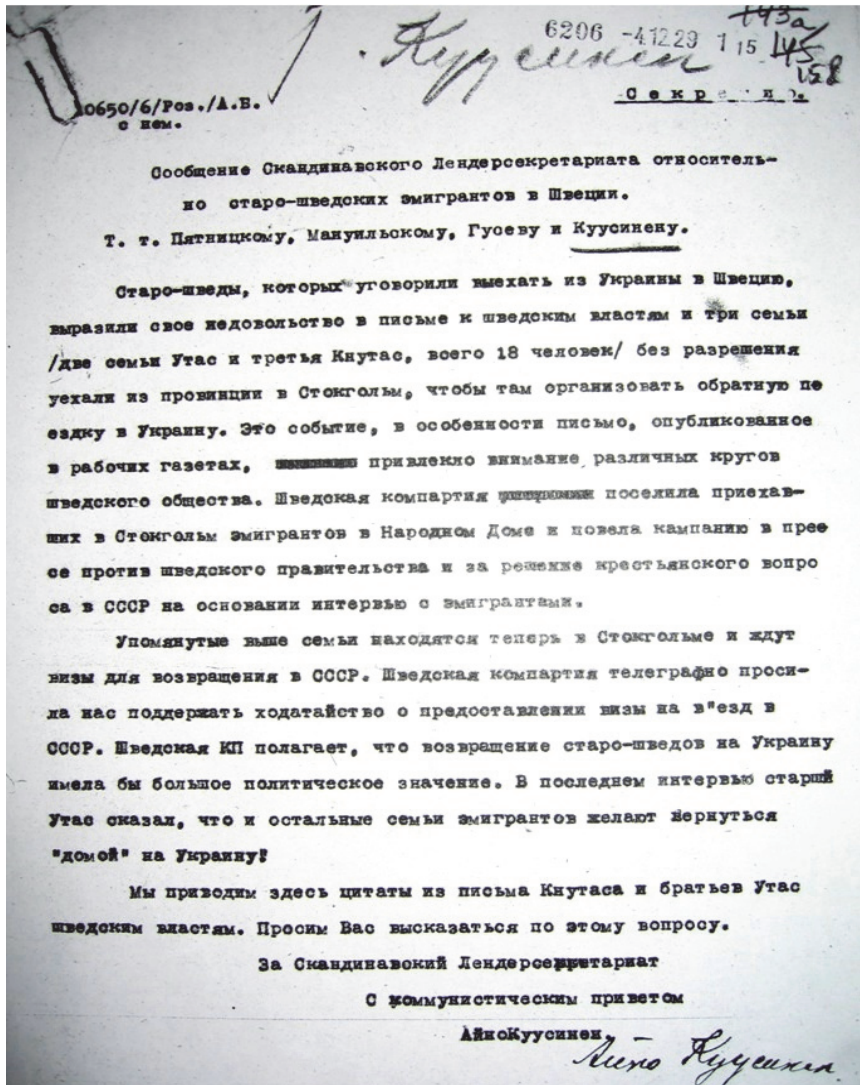
¹² Urban Lundberg, *En fokusering och tre punkter – en studie av SKPs försök att vinna arbetarklassen åt kommunismen under perioden 1929–1935*. Unpublished C-thesis in history (Stockholm University, 1994), 36–40.

¹³ RGASPI, f. 495, op. 275, d. 284.

¹⁴ Olof Mustelin, "Allan Wallenius - biblioteksman, publicist och revolutionär," in *Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland*: 59 (Helsingfors, 1984), 269–389.

¹⁵ Lundberg, *En fokusering*, 40–42.

Document 6: The report of the Secretariat for Scandinavian concerning the Old-Swedish immigrants in Sweden.



Source: Memorandum regarding the Ukrainian Swedes prepared by Aino Kuusinen, referent of the Skandinaviska ländersekretariatet for the leading staff of the Comintern, in RGASPI, f. 495, op. 31, d. 153.

Therefore, the former Gammalsvenskby villagers residing in Sweden became a testing ground for the agrarian work of the SKP. The protocols of

SKP's decision-making body, the political bureau, are not available for the years 1929–1932, as the party was in deep crisis, and many members were persecuted by the secret police. However, the few available documents that are available prove that Gammalsvenskby played an important role in the politics of the new party. At least six of the fifteen members of the political bureau of the SKP, including the party leaders Hugo Sillén and Sven Linderot, took immediate part in the discussions on the Old Swedes.

On the party's initiative, a special committee was formed, Arbetarnas Svenskbykommitté, to work among the colonists and to spite the official, state-led committee. The communists Kasper Gustafsson, Hilmer Fredriksson, Carl Bengtsson and Gunnar Sedin formed part of it. The members of the committee were in contact with the Swedish authorities, and carried out active propaganda to involve colonists in Communist activities. In addition, candidates for party work and activists in the women's movement (Lydia Utas) were chosen among the former villagers. These people and party agitators went on tours around the country.¹⁶ For example, on 14 May 1931, the Swedish colonist Johan Knutas held a speech along with the well-known party agitator Fritjof Lager in the park of the town of Spånga.¹⁷

Information material about the villagers' desire to get back to the USSR became a regular topic which appeared regularly in the Communist press, playing an important part in the debates with the publications of the Social Democrats and the Communists led by Karl Kilbom.¹⁸ SKP issued an optimistic note to the Swedish colonists explaining the meaning of a collective farm – the *kolkhoz*:

You ask if you get pigs and chickens and have them as your own. Of course, you will get them if you buy them. It is only the land that is collective. Not houses and gardens. You write about the

¹⁶ ARAB, Vänsterpartiet Kommunisterna. Protokoll politbyrå 1927–1931. Vol. A 3:1. RE 5/1.

¹⁷ ARAB. Gamla samlingen. Vol. 11737. Bild nr. XXL 1931:008. Affisch "Tillbaka till Sovjet-Unionen. Föredrag hålles torsdagen den 14 maj kl. 4 e. m. (Kristi himmelfärdsdag) i Spånga Folkets park av svenskbybon Johan Knutas. Dessutom föredras Fritjof Lager över ämnet Sovjet-Unionens diktatur eller Sveriges demokrati. Diskussion."

¹⁸ Jonas Ramstedt, "Utsagningsobjekt eller Stamfränder: rapporteringen om Ukraina-svenskar i vänsterpress 1929–1931, ur klass- och nationalitetssynpunkt," Unpublished Bachelor Thesis in historia. Supervised by Andrej Kotljarchuk (Södertörn University, 2007).

tractor. Now there are twenty tractors in Röd Svenskby. There are even those who can repair them/.../.¹⁹

On the initiative of the SKP the villagers made a formal request for a visa permitting them to return to the USSR. The Central Committee of the SKP sent a telegram to the Secretariat for the Scandinavian countries requesting them “to support an application for entry into the USSR and to emphasize the political value of the return of the Old Swedes to the Ukrainian Soviet Republic.”²⁰ As a result, the adviser of the Secretariat for the Scandinavian countries Aino Kuusinen prepared a memorandum which was presented to several leading staff members of the Comintern.

For Comintern the Gammalsvenskby project was interesting not only because of its value for the SKP. The future Swedish *kolkhoz* was an ideal place to send young Swedish communists studying at Comintern schools. Information about successes of the socialist construction in the Röd Svenskby could be publicized abroad through the radio of and the printed press of the Comintern. That was the usual practice. A group of Scandinavian communists was sent by the Comintern to inform members of the collective fishery *Polarstjernen* (The Polar star), and the Norwegian national village of Tsypnavolok. The Norwegian communist newspaper “Nordland Arbeiderblad” published a series of articles about the wonderful life of the Soviet-Norwegian fishermen.²¹ Many Nordic communists were working at the national Finnish *kolkhozes* of Ingria, Karelia and North Caucasus.

The Soviet government

As a result of the negotiations between the Swedish and Soviet governments and on the basis of decree number 83, dated 6 June 1929, of the political bureau of the Soviet Communist party, the whole population of the village moved to Sweden at the end of July 1929.²² The information about their departure attracted international attention,²³ and roused hopes among the

¹⁹ Jörgen Hedman, Lars Åhlander, *Historien om Gammalsvenskby och svenskarna i Ukraina* (Stockholm: Dialogos, 2003), 217.

²⁰ RGASPI, f. 495, op. 31, d. 153, l. 158.

²¹ Morten Jentoft, *De som dro østover. Kola-nordmennenes historie* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2001), 87–114.

²² *Politburo TsK RKP (b)-VKP (b). Povestka dnia zasedanii, 1919–1929*, t. 1 (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2000), 696–697; Oleg Ken, Aleksander Rupasov i Lennart Samuelsson, *Shvetsiia v politike Moskvyy 1930–1950* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2005), 34–35.

²³ See as example: “Swedish colonists return from Ukraine,” *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, July 27, 1929, 2.

other ethnic minorities of Ukraine. In the fall of 1929 around 11,000 German colonists from southern Ukraine and the Crimea, after having sold all their belongings, went to Moscow where they approached the German and Canadian embassies about getting visas. As a result of the negotiations between Germany and the USSR at the end of 1929 around 6,500 German colonists and Mennonites were permitted to leave the USSR. The struggle of the German peasants was continued in 1930.²⁴ The Kremlin considered their case as a special kind of class struggle by German colonists and insisted that the Ukrainian authorities should stop the inflow of German colonists to Moscow. In February 1930 the issue of mass emigration was discussed in the plenum of the central committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, which adopted a resolution on how “to neutralize those anti-Soviet activities.”²⁵ Mass emigration of Ukrainian Poles to Poland in the winter of 1929–1930 could be prevented only by strengthening border controls. The Polish authorities correctly noted that there was a direct link between the Ukrainian Poles’ wish to emigrate and “the organized mass emigration of the Swedish colonists.”²⁶ That is why the return of the Swedes back to the USSR could be used as a powerful ideological tool in the anti-emigration propaganda. Indeed, one of the first articles in the Kherson newspapers covering this topic considered the return of the Swedes to the USSR to be a lesson for the German colonists.

On 5 January 1930, the leading newspaper of the Kherson region *Naddniprianska Pravda* published the news that the collectivization process was to be completed and the kulaks liquidated as a social class. According to the decision of the regional party committee all homesteads were to be collectivized by 1 March 1930. “We have time limits of less than two months, not a single hour, not a single minute should be wasted,” wrote the newspapers to warn their readers.²⁷ However, the process proved extremely difficult because of the strong resistance of the German colonists. In the reports of the GPU, the situation in the German colonies of southern

²⁴ Harvey L. Dyck, *Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia, 1926-1933: A Study in diplomatic instability* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966), 163–174; Natalia Ostasheva, *Na perelome epokh. Mennonitskoe obshchestvo Ukrainy v 1914–1931* (Moskva: Gotika, 1998), 162–165. Both authors do not see the connection between the emigration moods of Soviet Germans in late 1929 with the mass emigration of Swedish colonists to Sweden.

²⁵ Viktor Chentsov, “Kollektivizatsiia” in *Nemtsy Ukrainy*, ed. Svetlana Bobyleva, t. 7 (Moskva: Obshchestvennaia akademiia nauk rossiiskikh nemtsev, 2002), 101–105.

²⁶ Jan Bruski, “Bolshoi golod na Ukraine v svete dokumentov polskoi diplomatii i razvedki,” *Europa* 6, no. 21 (2006): 106.

²⁷ *Naddniprianska Pravda*, January 5, 1930, 1.

Ukraine was described as very close to rebellion.²⁸ Spontaneous uprisings by women took place in one village after another and people refused to work. In the spring of 1930, many fields remained waste. The wide-spread corruption in the Stalinist state made it possible for the German colonists to use bribes to have deported relatives sent back to them from Siberia. Several false certificates were issued by local village soviets to the effect that people who had been deported were in fact poor peasants, not *kulaks*. The Ukrainian peasants thought that this showed that “the soviet authorities are afraid of Germans.”²⁹

Under these circumstances, the benevolent foundation of a Swedish *kolkhoz* could be a powerful tool in Soviet propaganda. To illustrate this one could mention the resolution adopted by the political bureau of the VKP(b) on 21 June 1931 on the resettlement of 77 peasant families from Poland in Soviet Ukraine; this would be “very useful for organizing at least one good, even better model *kolkhoz* which would effectively undermine the propaganda of the bourgeois press in Poland.”³⁰ Similar ideas were at work in a resolution on the creation of a Swedish *kolkhoz*. The idea to create model *kolkhozes* based on emigrant groups was not new. Since the mid-1920s there was an American *kolkhoz* in Tambov province.³¹ In 1932 there were circa thirty foreign *kolkhozes* in the USSR employing more than 5,000 immigrants.³²

The negotiations concerning the Old Swedes and their return to Soviet Ukraine were conducted by the Soviet ambassador to Sweden Alexandra Kollontai who had talks with the Prime Minister of Sweden Carl Gustaf Ekman and Foreign Minister Fredrik Ramel.³³ All practical matters in

²⁸ Andrea Graziosi, “Collectivisation, révoltes paysannes et politiques gouvernementales à travers les rapports du GPU d’Ukraine de février-mars 1930,” *Cahiers du monde russe*, no. 35 (1994), 438–472.

²⁹ E. A. Solonchuk, “Raskulachivanie v nemetskikh natsionalnykh raionakh Odesskogo okruga: zima-vesna 1930 (po materialam spetssvodok okružnogo GPU v partiinye organy,” in *Nemtsy Odessy i Odesskogo regiona* ed. Alfred Eisfeld (Odessa: Astropoint, 2003), 217–233.

³⁰ Oleg Ken and Aleksandr Rupasov, *Politbiuro TsK VKP (b) i otnosheniia SSSR s zapadnymi stranami*, vol. 1, 1928–1934 (St Petersburg: Evropeiskii Dom, 2000), 526–527.

³¹ Aleksandr Kurylev, “Opyt trudovoi deiatel’nosti rossiiskikh re-immigrantov v selskom khoziaistve v 1920-e gody. Na primere Pervoi Irskoi kommuny re-immigrantov iz Ameriki,” in *Problemy sotsial’nogo i gumanitarnogo znaniia* (St Petersburg: European University Press, 1999), 403–437.

³² Anders Gustafson, *Svenska sovjetemigranter: om de svenska kommunisterna och emigrationen till Sovjetunionen på 1920- och 1930-talen* (Linköping: Nixon, 2006), 17.

³³ Alexandra Kollontai, *Diplomaticheskie dnevniki*, vol. 2, 1922–1940 (Moskva: Academia, 2001), 12–14, 42–43; TASS communiqué. *Izvestiya*, August 13, 1931. Alexandra Kollontai

connection with the re-emigration were the responsibility of Consul Vladimir Smirnov.³⁴ Viktor Kopp, an ethnic German from Crimea by origin and former Soviet ambassador to Sweden, prepared the report for the Kremlin about the Old Swedes.³⁵ Having gone through all aspects of the matter he proposed "That they should be allowed to return on the condition that funding was provided by the Swedish government." In the end, the Swedish government paid the costs of the return of the colonists back to the USSR.

The final decision about the re-emigration of the Old Swedes was taken at the very highest level. On 15 June 1930 the political bureau of the VKP(b) led by Stalin responded positively to Kollontai's request "about letting in 40 Swedish colonists."³⁶ However, those who had already become Swedish citizens were given a visa "only if they agreed to join a kolkhoz."³⁷

The re-emigration by the Swedes became a hot topic in the Soviet mass media. TASS informed regularly about the circumstances of their return. This news was also covered by the leading newspapers *Izvestiia* and *Pravda* as well as newspapers of the Soviet Ukraine and special editions for the Soviet Germans.³⁸ The film studio *Sovkinozhurnal* produced a short documentary film in 1930 called "Obratno v SSSR" (Back to the USSR).³⁹ A tract called "Dva goda v Evrope. Pochemu krestiane sela Staroshvedskogo vernulis iz Shvetsii" (Two Years in Europe: Why the Villagers of Gammalsvenskby Returned from Sweden) was published. The Ukrainian filmmaker Alexander Dovzhenko found this topic so interesting that he planned

was half-Swedish by origin. Her mother Alexandra Massalin was a Swedish noblewoman from Eastern Finland, see: Hans Björkegren, *Ryska posten: de ryska revolutionärerna i Norden 1906–1917* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1985), 113.

³⁴ Vladimir Smirnov (1876–1952) was an "old" Bolshevik and Soviet-Russian diplomat with Swedish as a second native language. His mother Wirginia Nygren was Finno-Swedish. Before the 1917 revolution he was a lecturer in Russian at Helsingfors University (Helsinki). He was married to Karin Strindberg, the daughter of the famous Swedish writer August Strindberg. Smirnov had good connections with in the 1930s Swedish political and cultural elite. See: Yurii Dashkov, *Ego znali pod imenem Paulson. Dokumentalnaia povest o V. M. Smirnov* (Moskva: Izdatelstvo politicheskoi literatury, 1984).

³⁵ Oleg Ken, Aleksander Rupasov and Lennart Samuelsson, *Shvetsiia v politike Moskvyy*, note 37.

³⁶ *Politburo TsK RKP (b)-VKP (b). Povestka dnia zasedanii, 1930–1939* (Moskva, 2001), vol. 2, no. 128.

³⁷ RA, Socialstyrelsen, Handlingar angående utlänningsärenden 1920–1938. Handlingar rörande Gammalsvenskbyborna 1929–1931. F II:2. 1402.

³⁸ "Rückkehr schwedischer Emigranten ein Schlag gegen die pfäffische Konterrevolution," *Rote Zeitung*, September 5, 1931.

³⁹ RGAKFD, no. 2107, "Obratno v SSSR. Vystuplenie v dome krestianina gruppy shvedov-kolonistov vernuvshikhsia iz Shvetsii." *Sovkinozhurnal* no 4/267. 1930.

to make a film about the Old Swedes.⁴⁰ Thus, because of the powerful political forces involved, the return of a very limited number of Old Swedes to the USSR became a big international project.

Configuration of the new boundaries

A new historical canon and a new vision of the future

A series of publications from 1929–1931 illustrate how the international communist movement looked upon the past and future of the Swedish colony in Ukraine. All of these texts were first and foremost intended for those responsible for carrying out the new project, i.e., Swedish communists and Comintern employees.

In December 1929 an unknown author from the Comintern wrote a report called “Das Alt-Schwedische Dorf.” According to his analysis, Gammalsvenskby was home to class struggles and exploitation. Rich peasants (Grossbauer) like Johan Buskas who owned large plots of land turned the poor peasants (Kleinbauer) into their farm-hands, making them work for next to nothing. They were assisted by the Lutheran pastor, who also belonged to the class of exploiters. The October Revolution 1917 put an end to this exploitation, and justice with regard to land ownership became the rule. The Soviet power liberated the poor Swedish peasants, but capitalistic Sweden turned them into slaves again:

The land was distributed in the same proportions to all except the priest who was not given land. That was surely the reason for his stomach aches. That is why the pastor launched the propaganda about going to Sweden, but the kulaks were the most interested supporting faction in this matter. In Sweden the victims of the Swedish nationalist propaganda became slaves of the landowners. The Swedish working class and the Communist Party came to the rescue of the cheated peasants. Now the colonists are ready to go back to Ukraine by foot. If they are given permission to re-emigrate, the kolkhoz will be created there not only for Swedish dwellers of the village, also Germans and Jews will join. The new life will put an end to nationalism and will be based upon the principles of the working solidarity and fraternity.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Alexander Dovzhenko, *The poet as filmmaker. Selected writings*, ed. Marco Carynnyk (Cambridge: MIT press, 1973), 68.

⁴¹ “Das Alt-Schwedische Dorf,” RGASPI, f. 495, op. 31, d.153, ll. 146–158.

On 23 January 1930 the political bureau of the SKP charged the propaganda group with the preparation and publishing of a brochure dedicated to the so-called “Svenskby affair.” The political bureau thought this publication would “help our comrades to gain an understanding of those matters.”⁴² The book “Svenskbyskandalen” (The Swedish Village Scandal) was printed in 1930. The author of the book was Gustav Johansson, who was at the same time a leading left-wing journalist and the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Ny Dag* (New Day). Johansson viewed the story of the village in the same way as the Comintern report did, through the prism of class struggle and in the light of the leading position of the clergy in the village. The first months the Old Swedes spent in Sweden were seen as an example of capitalist exploitation and bourgeois cynicism. However, notwithstanding their conservatism the poor colonists quickly realized they had made a mistake and declared their wish to go back to the USSR. They approached the SKP for help (in fact the party agitator was planning to make propaganda work among the Ukrainian Swedes). The party could not leave “the victims of the nationalist propaganda” to their fate and therefore created the Workers’ Swedish Committee. Funds were raised for the purchase of a tractor. The first group of colonists had already gone back to Ukraine where “the world of the old tradition gave place today to a kolkhoz in Röd Svenskby, a small part of the great Soviet socialist construction.”⁴³

When all Old Swedes wishing to return were back in the village, a brochure to be used for ideological work “Dva goda v Evrope” (Two Years in Europe) was published. The author used an assumed name, Mikhail Vasilev; most probably it was Maria Andriievskaia, a journalist from the Soviet peasant magazine *Lapot*.⁴⁴ The style of the brochure was plain and simple, the booklet was cheap (3 kopecks only), and the print run was 150,000 copies. Apparently, the target audience was expected to be extremely large. The book contained a set of interviews by the author with three peasants who had come back, Greis Albers, Petter J. Knutas and Alvina Knutas. However, their names were russified. The book contained a lot of false information and errors. This was of no concern to the author, as the main purpose was to provide a clear Marxist account of the past, present and future of Gammalsvenskby. According to the author, the resettlers founded the Swedish colony as “life in

⁴² ARAB. Vänsterpartiet Kommunisterna. Protokoll politbyrå 1927–1931. Vol. A 3:1. RE 5/1. Protokoll 7. February 23, 1930, f. 4.

⁴³ Gustav Johansson, *Svenskbyskandalen* (Stockholm: Arbetarkultur, 1930), 35.

⁴⁴ Ivan F. Masanov, *Slovar psevdonimov russkikh pisatelei, uchenykh i obshchestvennykh deiatelei*, t.1 (Moskva: Knizhnaia Palata, 1956), 229.

Sweden was hardly possible, one and a half centuries before famine and poverty had driven the first group of desperate and brave men from Sweden to Russia.”⁴⁵ The colony became rich,

if compared to an average Russian village, the Swedish colonists had their own hospital, school, library house and their own national minority village administration. However, notwithstanding this apparent prosperity an ardent class struggle was in evidence in the village. As here, within this little piece of the Soviet land the kulaks were extremely opposed to giving up.⁴⁶

According to the author, the real reason for the Old Swedes to move back to Sweden had been the collectivization and the resistance to it of the kulaks. In fact, the resolution on the emigration and departure of the colonist from the USSR was adopted before the collectivization campaign was launched in the Kherson Oblast. The plan to emigrate was the work of “the agent of capitalists” pastor Hoas and supported by *kulaks*, a caste of well-to-do farmers. The author employed the commonplace Soviet propaganda theme of the class struggle. The emigration is considered as a special kind of class struggle, as a reaction of by the *kulaks* to collectivization. The *kulaks* also had their allies: the priest, religious members of the community and poor but evil men called *podkulachniki*.⁴⁷ The stay in Sweden is depicted in gloomy and exaggerated terms. The situation of a farm-hand in Sweden is almost the same as that of an animal. According to Petter J. Knutas, the landowner Axtorp made the Old Swedes drink water out of a drum filled with cows’ urine. Knutas said that in Sweden his daughter gave birth in the farmyard without any obstetrical help, whilst in Gammalsvenskby all women gave birth at the local hospital. If necessary, they could stay there for a long time, and could afford not to work thanks to an allowance from the state for bringing up a child. In Sweden, the Gammalsvenskby Swedes became slaves living in inhuman misery, sleeping being their sole entertainment. Petter J. Knutas concludes: “I left Soviet Russia as a simple,

⁴⁵ Mikhail Vasilev (pseud.), *Dva goda v Evrope. Pochemu krestiane sela Staroshvedskogo vernulis iz Shvetsii* (Two Years in Europe. Why the Villagers of Gammalsvenskby Returned from Sweden) (Leningrad: Priboi, 1931), 4.

⁴⁶ Vasilev, *Dva goda v Evrope*, 4–5.

⁴⁷ *Podkulachnik* is a Stalinist neologism means – “a person aiding the kulaks.” This political label was used in the 1930s to designate those poor and middle-wealthy farmers who sided with *kulaks* in their opposition to collectivization and therefore persecuted by the Soviet regime as class enemies.

ignoramus, but in Sweden I became a revolutionary.”⁴⁸ The author emphasizes the fact that the Old Swedes had taken an active part in the communist movement while still in Sweden. For example, a column consisting of 100 Ukrainian Swedes took part in the May Day demonstration in Stockholm in 1931. Thus, according to the author, the return to the USSR was a conscious choice “move on from the old to the new, from the slavery under *kulaks* to the free life in the *kolkhoz* under the guidance of the Bolshevik Party.”⁴⁹

The aim of the socialist construction they had engaged in was formulated in an address dated 20 August 1931 with the heading “To the workers of the Soviet Union and the whole world!” In all 180 Swedes promised “to correct a big mistake made under the influence of letters from the priest and propaganda by kulaks, and to struggle together with all other peasants for total collectivization, for the liquidation of kulaks as a class.” Special emphasis was given to their wish to make the “bitter experience” of their emigration known among the workers of the USSR. In accordance with Soviet political culture at the time, the address ended with cheers for the party, its leader comrade Stalin and the world revolution of the proletariat. In this way, the creation of the *kolkhoz* was the price the Swedes had to pay for their mistake.⁵⁰

Following the return of the first group to the village, an international meeting was arranged on the premises of the club (in the building of the former Swedish Church) with the German and Jewish neighbors of the Swedes. The Swedish communist Paul Söderman (“comrade Lindroos”) opened the meeting. He was followed by Petter J. Knutas, who had become a member of the Communist Party in Sweden. Both speakers repeated the main theses of the party instructions, and said they were confident that all colonists still remaining in Sweden, excluding the kulaks, would return to their Motherland. Petter J. Knutas said more specifically:

Having been in Sweden for a short time, we have at first hand experienced what capitalist exploitation is. Now we truly understand that only the Soviet government and Communist Party are our friends /.../ We will do everything to help the party to correct the mistake we have committed.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Vasilev, *Dva goda v Evrope*, 11.

⁴⁹ Vasilev, *Dva goda v Evrope*, 14.

⁵⁰ Vasilev, *Dva goda v Evrope*, 16.

⁵¹ Jungsturm, “Tilky radvlada i kompartii nashi druzi,” *Nadniprianska Pravda*, January 21, 1930, 2.

Illustration 3: Two Years in Europe: Why the Villagers of Gammalsvenskby Returned from Sweden.



Source: Book cover of “Dva goda v Evrope. Pochemu krestiane sela Staroshvedskogo vernulis iz Shvetsii” (Leningrad: Priboi 1931). Note the straightforward visual pedagogy of the cover.

The same chord was struck in the short documentary film, “Obratno v SSSR” (Back to the USSR). The subtitles claimed that the Swedes wanted “to correct the mistake we made with the decision to go back to Ukraine with a

view to creating the first Swedish kolkhoz.”⁵² Thus, Soviet propaganda put forward three main principles for the future organization of Röd Svenskby. Firstly, a kolkhoz as a non-alternative socio-economic basis for all Swedish villagers would be founded. It was to function as an outpost of solid collectivization. Secondly, a cultural revolution would be launched. The values and customs of traditional agrarian society must be uprooted. Thirdly, the Swedish Communist Party and the Comintern would assume the leading role in the construction of a new socialist Swedish village.

A new administrative and geographical landscape

An important instrument in Soviet policy was to give places new names, particularly if the old ones were connected with the ancient regime. The new names were symbolic ones and served the purpose of building a new Soviet identity. In 1924, the capital city of the former Russian Empire was renamed Leningrad, despite the fact that Lenin was not born there, nor had he studied there.⁵³ The old name of the city was associated with St Peter and the emperor Peter I. In the same year, Iuzovka, an industrial centre in southern Ukraine, which was named after the Welsh businessman and founder of the city John Hughes, was renamed Stalino. In 1926 the other centre of the southern Ukraine – Ekaterinoslav was renamed Dnipropetrovsk.⁵⁴ Since 1926, the Swedish name of the village, Gammalsvenskby, received official recognition and was used by the local authorities besides the Russian and the Ukrainian names of the village. However, the historical name included the adjective “old,” and that was not suitable in the light of the ongoing construction of a new world. On 5 February 1931 the newspaper of the central committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine *Radianske selo* wrote that the Swedes had not come back to Ukraine to rebuild the historical Gammalsvenskby, but to create a modern Red Swedish Commune.⁵⁵ On 16 February the same newspaper wrote that the village soviet of Gammalsvenskby had decided to change the name of the village to Röd Svenskby (Red Swedish Village).⁵⁶ The Swedish communist

⁵²RGAKFD, no. 2107, “Obratno v SSSR. Vystuplenie v dome krestianina gruppy shvedov-kolonistov vernuvshikhsia iz Shvetsii,” *Sovkinozhurnal*, no. 4/267, 1930.

⁵³Literally “City of Lenin.”

⁵⁴Literally “Glory of Catherine II.”

⁵⁵“Pane Hooz vasha sprava prohrana,” *Radianske selo*, February 5, 1931.

⁵⁶“Staro-Shvedske stae Chervono-Shvedskym,” *Radianske selo*, February 16, 1931.

press used the new name of the colony.⁵⁷ On 21 March 1931 communist newspaper *Ny Dag* published the article “Röda Svenskby är stadd i snabb utveckling” (Röd Svenskby is under rapid development) describing the successes of communist construction and the Soviet nationalities policy towards the Ukrainian Swedes. In letters to the Secretariat for the Scandinavian Countries, the secretary of the local branch of the party of Gammalsvenskby Edvin Blom gave as his address (in Russian): USSR, Berislav district, Red Swedish village.⁵⁸ The decision to change the name was taken by the authorities, but according to Soviet political culture the initiative should really have come from below. The very first time a new, revolutionary name appears is in the book “Two Years in Europe.” In response to the final remark made by the author: “The address should be written ...Kherson region, Old-Swedish colony,” the Swedish colonists are said to have replied confidently: “No, that’s wrong; you should write Red Swedish *kolkhoz*.”⁵⁹

However, the *kolkhoz* was instead named after the Swedish Communist Party. The choice of name was meant to emphasize the special status of the *kolkhoz*, the activities of which had been carried out under the auspices of the international communist movement. It should be noted that the new name of the village disappeared along with the international communist project and from 1934 to 1945 the historical name of the village Staroshvedskoe (Old-Swedish village) is used in all known sources.

The village was given its former administrative status as a national Swedish village council, the only one in Ukraine and the Soviet Union. This was a breach of Ukrainian law, as the minimum demographic norm for creating a national council was 500 persons.⁶⁰ The number of the Swedes, who came back to the USSR, including also the families of the Swedish communists who settled in the village, did not exceed 300 persons. The decision was dictated by the political importance of the project, as well as by the hope to attract new members to the Swedish colony. Between 1930 and 1933, the Old Swedes who went back to the USSR maintained continuous contact with those who preferred to stay in Sweden. Up to 1932, the letters of the Soviet Swedes described the successes of the new life in the USSR and

⁵⁷ “Röda Svenskby är stadd i snabb utveckling,” *Ny Dag*, Februari 21, 1931, 1; “Svensk sovjetarbetare berättar om Röda Svenskby just nu,” *Ny Dag*, April 4, 1931, 1, 8; “Röda Svenskby hälsar SKP,” *Ny Dag*, May 14, 1932, 1; “Kamrat Blom berättar om Sovjets land,” *Stormklockan*, no. 7 (1932): 2.

⁵⁸ RGASPI, f. 495, op. 275, d. 341. Lichnoe delo. Hugo Albert Lauenstein.

⁵⁹ Vasilev, *Dva goda v Evrope*, 16.

⁶⁰ A. B. Glinskii, *Natsionalnye menshinstva na Ukraine* (Kharkov: Tsentrizdat, 1931), 31.

called upon the former Gammalsvenskby who were now in Sweden to return to their home. For example, Petter J. Knutas wrote the following in a letter to Andreas Annas (30 November 1931):

I live a hundred times better than I lived in Sweden. I am glad to be free from the Swedish plague. We work in our kolkhoz or *artel* as we call it. The damned priests continue to poison the people and those who are ignorant still believe them, but they will never deceive us again. We have a cinema with sessions four times a month and we pay only 7 rubles 50 kopecks from the whole village /.../ On the commemoration of the October Revolution we had a holiday, we organized a banquet in the church (roasted two calves), and then watched movies. We need more workers. Come back, because we are building socialism, even for those who remained in Sweden. Welcome home!

Swedish Communist Party Kolkhoz Röd Svenskby.⁶¹

Creating a new hierarchy

The status of the national Soviet corresponded well with the policy of indigenization. Introduced in the USSR in 1923, it provided the representatives of ethnic minorities with the privilege to occupy the administrative positions within the framework of the autonomous regions. In 1926 a national Swedish village council was created in Gammalsvenskby, the only one in the USSR. In this way, the Swedish colony was for the first time in its history separated administratively from the neighboring German settlements and the separate ethnic status of the Swedes was explicitly recognized. This enabled the Swedes to occupy all administrative positions and, what is even more important, to take decisions at the local level and function as spokesman for the decisions taken locally. All letters from 1928 to 1929 from the inhabitants of Gammalsvenskby to the Soviet authorities concerning the emigration to Sweden were written as official requests of the local organ of power to the regional and central authorities. It was these local authorities that issued the special permission which enabled the pastor Kristoffer Hoas and the farmer Johan Buskas to go to Sweden and to act as their representatives and prepare for the villagers' move there.⁶²

⁶¹ Andreas Annas, *Livet i Gammalsvenskby*. Unpublished manuscript, accessed August 2, 2010, <http://www.svenskbyborna.com>

⁶² RA. Utrikesdepartementet 1920 års dossiersystem. P 1534, f. 17, Kristoffer Hoas, "Gammal-Svenskby." Unpublished manuscript, 1938, 54 p.

On their return to the USSR, the status of the Swedish national council was reorganized in breach of the norms of the law. The Gammalsvenskby Swedes had to share power with Swedish communists who had come to the village to speed up the construction of socialism there.

In this way, ethnic Swedes again occupied the leading positions in Gammalsvenskby. The Swedish communist Edvin Blom became secretary of the party unit and chairman of the village council. Johan Utas was elected chairman of the *kolkhoz*; shortly to be replaced by the communist Petter J. Knutas. The secret agent of the GPU Alexander Knutas became secretary of the village council. The communist Karl Andersson received the important position of the agronomist of the machine and tractor station (MTS) of Berislav, which served the *kolkhoz*. Hugo Albert Lauenstein was appointed head of the village library and reading room.

A number of other striking differences can be detected in the distribution of power in the Swedish village before the emigration and after it. Before 1929, there were no members of the Communist Party and Komsomol in the village. The inspection carried out in August 1928 by TsKNM noted that “there is no interest in the building of socialism among the villagers; the children are under strong religious influence.”⁶³ The inspection also noted that the inhabitants were highly influenced by the pastor Kristoffer Hoas and his wife Emma even after they had left the USSR for Sweden. Emma Hoas, who was a Swedish citizen, had lived in the village since 1899. Kristoffer Hoas, who was born in the village, had graduated from the Russian-German seminary in Sarata and had worked as a teacher at the Swedish school until 1922. During his stay in Sweden in 1922, he was ordained in Uppsala with a mission to serve in Gammalsvenskby and Southern Russia. His ordination became the cause of a very deep conflict between Hoas (who had no formal theological training) and the German pastor of the Alt-Schwedendorf parish Woldemar Schlupp who had the theological qualifications usually required.⁶⁴ In order to prevent the conflict from getting out of hand the authorities gave permission for the registration of a separate Swedish parish. The reason they stated for this decision was that the Swedish villagers said they did not understand German, a claim which was not true.⁶⁵

⁶³ DAKhO, f. R-2, op. 1, spr. 558, arkk.85-94; f. R-2, op. 4, spr. 105, ark. 21.

⁶⁴ Wilhelm Kahle, *Geschichte der lutherischen evangelischen Gemeinden in der Sowetunion, 1917-1938* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 247–251.

⁶⁵ DAKhO, f. R-2, op. 1, spr. 1377, ark. 10.

It was not merely the religious influence of the pastor on his parishioners that mattered. Kristoffer Hoas was the official representative of the Red Cross of Sweden in Soviet Ukraine. All food and economic assistance from Sweden to Gammalsvenskby was distributed through him.⁶⁶ Only throughout the period of 1926–1928 Gammalsvenskby received from Sweden the considerable amount of the economic aid in 14,602 rubles in total.⁶⁷ The Swedish Red Cross also supported the village dispensary. As a commissioner of the Swedish Red Cross, the pastor negotiated with all Swedish bureaucrats who came to the village as well as with the local authorities. The attempt to limit the pastor's authority was not successful and after a diplomatic intervention, the local authorities had to give all his real estate back to him. This farming economy meant that rich peasants, mill owners and the owners of the largest plots of land wielded considerable influence over the poor.

After a group of the former colonists had returned to the USSR the situation changed drastically. The pastor did not return, the church was closed and turned into a club. The majority of the colonists preferred to stay in Sweden but, under the influence of Swedish communists, several of them joined the party. Woldemar Utas, Petter J. Knutas, Petter E. Utas and Irja Buskas were among them.

An important task of the Soviet policy at this point was the preparation of the young shift of the Communist contractors. In the short term, a *Komsomol* unit was created in the village.⁶⁸ The new *Komsomol* members were offered high-ranking positions in the local hierarchy. Lydia Utas became head of the dairy farm. Sigfrid Utas was appointed teacher at the Swedish school. The sport interest group also worked under his guidance. Sigfrid Utas became the first cycle champion of Ukraine.⁶⁹ The tractor driver, Johannes Knutas, was given the position of team-leader; he also became head of the local section of the Soviet paramilitary youth organization. In this way in a very short period, the authorities altered the social hierarchy of the Swedish community, and active participants in the communist movement found themselves in the most favorable positions.

⁶⁶ Hoas, "Gammal-Svenskby," 12–48.

⁶⁷ Hedman, Åhlander, *Historien om Gammalsvenskby*, 159.

⁶⁸ Viktor Pryluts'kii, "Molod u suspilno-politychnomu zhytti USRR 1928–1933," *Ukrainskii istorychnyi zhurnal*, no. 4 (2002): 60–79.

⁶⁹ Anatolii Andreev, "Khersonets – pervyi chempion po velosportu," *Gryvna-SV*, February 17, 2006, 15.

In accordance with the Bolshevik program of *smychka*⁷⁰ the Soviet government, through their consul in Stockholm Vladimir Smirnov, suggested the Swedish communists to draw up a “list of fifteen Swedish comrades wishing to enter the USSR to build the first Swedish kolkhoz there.”⁷¹ There is no information whether the list was ever made. But a group of Swedish communists eventually came to Gammalsvenskby. This group included Comintern employees who came to Gammalsvenskby for different kinds of inspections, and students of the Comintern schools sent to the Swedish *kolkhoz* to undergo their summer training. Some of them were sent directly by the SKP. There were also some impostors, Swedish communists who came to the village on their own from other regions of the USSR, after having read about the kolkhoz in newspapers. Most of them came to the village with their families or married in the village. In the archives, the following Swedish communists are mentioned as working in the village: Edvin Blom, Karl Andersson, Hugo Albert Lauenstein, Karl Ture Gräas, Kasper Gustafsson, Hildur Gustafsson, Karl Sigfrid Holmström, Gunnar Blomberg, Erik Karlsson (party alias Karl Johansson), Paul Söderman (party alias Karl Nils Lindroos) and Erik Petersson. Two well-known SKP members, William Heikkinen (party alias Edward Wallin) and Björn Hallström (party alias Red Björn), also planned to settle in Gammalsvenskby, but they did not reach the village.

The biographies of the communists who worked in Gammalsvenskby show that the Comintern and the SKP carefully selected the best-suited candidates. Erik Karlsson and Paul Söderman originated from peasant families, a rare case for members of the SKP. The Swedes who came to the village from Karelia had worked at a greenhouse centre near Petrozavodsk, thus having at least a minimum experience of agricultural work.⁷² Karl Andersson was an experienced agronomist, who had worked in Denmark for long periods. The communist Hugo Albert Lauenstein was a blacksmith, whose skills would be in high demand in any *kolkhoz*.

⁷⁰*Smychka* means linkage between city and village.

⁷¹ DAKhO, f. R-4033, op. 9, spr. 85, ark. 100.

⁷² Gustafson, *Svenska sovjetemigranter*, 47–50.

Document 7: Recommendation of the Politburo of the Swedish Communist Party to comrade Hugo Lauenstein issued by SKP, certified by Edwin Blom. October 7, 1932.

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Telefonat:
NOER 30325 (r+s+e)
Efter kl. 6
interurbana samtal
Nöer 303 27
POSTGIRÖ 51188

Sverges Kommunistiska Parti

(SEKTION AV KOMMUNISTISKA INTERNATIONALEN)

Barnhusgatan 12^m - Stockholm C

R e k o m m e n d a t i o n .

Genosse Hugo Lauenstein hat sich seit 1920¹⁹²⁰ in Schweden aufgehalten. Er kam damals als politische fluechtling aus Hamburg, wo er seit gruendung der KP Deutschlands Mitglied dieser Partei war.

Während seines Aufenthaltes in Schweden hat er aktiv in der kommunistischen Bewegung gearbeitet.

Von 1 November 1924 ist er Mitglied der KP Schwedens gewesen, und ~~hat~~ ^{sich} in der Stockholmerorganisation immer als guter Kommunist aufgetreten.

Da Genosse Lauenstein nun Schweden verlässt um in der Sovjet-Union zu arbeiten, empfehlen wir ihm auf das beste an alle Parteinstanzen und Parteimitglieder, und ~~empfehlen~~ sein uebertritt in der KP der Sovjet-Union.

Stockholm den 7 Oktober 1932

SVERGES KOMMUNISTISKA PARTI
Sektion av Kommunistiska Internationalen
POLITISKA BYRÅN.

Til Lyggas allt framman Hugo Lauenstein
född 18/11 1884 i Stockholm.
18/11 32

Sekretar. Blom Edwin

номинация секретаря Максимин Шкодаковича
у доброго друга и товарища Димитрия
Димитриевича
Горбачевский у.

Source: RGASPI, f. 495, op. 275, d. 341.

The Stockholm party organization sent the chairman of the Arbetarnas Svenskbykommitté Kasper Gustafsson to lead the socialist construction in Röd Svenskby. He had been working with the Ukrainian Swedes since they

first arrived in Sweden. His wife Hildur Gustafsson, who was also a party member, was supposed to lead the women's movement in the village.⁷³ However, by the time Gustafssons arrived in Gammalsvenskby, Swedish communists from Karelia, Edvin Blom, Ture Gräas and Sigfrid Holmström, had already taken all the senior positions. They had learnt from the Soviet press about the socialist project in Gammalsvenskby and had come to the village with their families independently of each other. All of them had emigrated from Sweden to Karelia where the construction of the Soviet Nordic republic was underway under the guidance of the Finnish communist Edward Gylling.⁷⁴ As a result of the conflict between Kasper Gustafsson and Edvin Blom, Gustafsson and his wife left Gammalsvenskby for Leningrad within a matter of months.⁷⁵

The Holodomor and the strategy of collective resistance

Under the totalitarian system that had been created, the authorities anticipated that the collective identity of the peasants would change quickly and radically. In the work “K voprosam agrarnoi politiki v SSSR” (On the issues of the agrarian policy in the USSR) from 1930 Stalin emphasized that the “collectivization will create a new type of peasant whose psychology has been ploughed up by the tractor.”⁷⁶ However, the resistance of the Swedish community stalled this process, while the fate of the Comintern project – the Swedish *kolkhoz* – was virtually sealed by *Holodomor*, the great famine that is estimated to have taken 3.5 million lives in Ukraine in the years 1932–1933. The mass arrests that followed crushed all remaining ambitions.

Initially it seemed as if the Swedish colonists were ideally suited for the construction of a prosperous *kolkhoz*. Those who had first gone to Sweden and then returned to the USSR had no land of their own, cattle or real estate. Thus there was no material ground for resistance to the collectivization process. There were no *kulaks* among the Swedes and consequently there was no need for dispossession and deportation. The state helped the Swedish community and gave them a credit of 85 thousand rubles to buy houses and repair them, and to buy cattle. Thanks to the

⁷³ “Till Röda Svenskby för att delta i socialismens byggande,” *Arbetar-Kvinnornas Tidning*, 1931:5–6, 8.

⁷⁴ See: Nick Baron, *Soviet Karelia: politics, planning and terror in Stalin's Russia, 1920–1939* (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁷⁵ DAKhO, f. R-4033, op. 9, spr. 85, ark. 81.

⁷⁶ Iosif Stalin, *K voprosam agrarnoi politiki v SSSR* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo, 1930), 8.

Comintern, the *kolkhoz* received a team of specialists, and tractors and trucks from the Berislav machinery and tractor station were made available to the *kolkhoz*. Several young Swedes were apprenticed free of charge as tractor and harvester drivers. The excellent black earth of the Kherson Oblast and the availability of water for irrigation from Dnipro River ensured high productivity in agriculture. The Swedish communist press painted an optimistic picture of the future of Röd Svenskby. For example, in a report from April 1931 there were the following enthusiastic lines:

The wide and long street runs between the white and beautiful mansions. In the center of the village is the former church, Hoas dopey temple, but on its tower is now the red flag, a symbol of new times above Nya Svenskby [New Swedish village]. The Swedish *kolkhoz* has got the name of Sveriges Kommunistiska Parti. The *kolkhoz* owns 765 acres of land. The state has granted a loan of 100 rubles for the purchase of livestock and agricultural machinery. The district government has provided an agronomist and tractors, as well as seeds for the next harvest. The former church is today the people's house, which is equipped with a stage, theatre props and the most modern cinema. In the village there is a reading-room with a Swedish library, a Swedish school, shop, medical center, department of the "Red Help" and "Osoviakhim." The next step will be a huge program of planting vineyards and orchards and the electrification of the village. "Never again Sweden" – say those who have returned and are now awaiting the return of the remaining 200 people still held by the government of Ekman [Carl Gustaf Ekman].⁷⁷

Barely two years later, another Swedish communist who worked in Röd Svenskby expressed a more pessimistic view:

The machines and the tractors crack one after another, there are no spare parts, and fuel is scarce. The soil has been exhausted. The plan of the state for the procurement of grain is not practicable. Instead of horses, hungry cows are used; as a result, the *kolkhoz* obtains a quantity of milk in the range of 12–13 liters per day from twenty cows. The food is beyond criticism. The people live on the verge of famine and work only under the most rigid control.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ "Svensk sovjetarbetare berättar om Röda Svenskby just nu," *Ny Dag*, April 4, 1931, 1, 8

⁷⁸ "Svenskarna leva på svältgränsen i Gammalsvenskby," *Borås tidning*, August 4, 1933.

In the absence of a pastor of their own in Gammalsvenskby the Swedes began to visit a German Lutheran church in the neighboring village of Schlangendorf. This is interesting in view of the fact that since the middle of the nineteenth century there existed a painful conflict between the Swedish and German parishioners about the question whether the parish should be divided or not. Following the arrest in 1933 of the last German pastor Friedrich Lang, the role of preacher was assumed by a Swedish woman, Alvina Hinas. In 1935, she was arrested for religious propaganda. In 1937 she was arrested again and executed.

Notwithstanding the fact that the young people appreciated the cinema, many members of the old generation were reluctant to enter the new club, as they believed in “the ghosts who had settled there.”⁷⁹ The new Swedish school also had some problems. In order to fight religion the school in Gammalsvenskby, like other schools, was open on Sundays and on Lutheran holidays. However, parents tried to keep their children at home on those days, using any pretext. None of the three teachers of the former elementary school of Gammalsvenskby returned from Sweden. It was not possible to train teachers specifically for the school in Gammalsvenskby, the only Swedish school in the USSR. No Soviet textbooks in Swedish were available. The Swedish communists Edvin Blom and Kasper Gustafsson as well their eldest daughters Siri Blom and Wilma Gustafsson worked as teachers without any pedagogical education. Later on they were joined by Sigfrid Utas and Maria Utas (Terenina) who graduated from the class for seven-year olds. While visiting Moscow in the beginning of 1932 Blom offered a position as a teacher to one of the best educated members of the SKP, Björn Hallström.⁸⁰ After becoming unemployed in 1934 in Sweden, Hallström sent a letter to the Comintern with a request to be appointed a teacher at the Swedish school in Gammalsvenskby. But the older party comrades talked him out of this idea referring to the famine in Ukraine not covered by the newspapers. Gustav Johansson told Hallström that “the picture he would witness could make a counter-revolutionary out of him, as he would question the correctness of Soviet policy and of Communism.”⁸¹

Thus, having neither qualified teachers nor the necessary literature, the Swedish school could not function normally. When the school was inspected for the first time, its work was found to be unsatisfactory. It used pre-revolution literature and Swedish books with portraits of the Swedish Royal

⁷⁹ Interview with Astrid Lauenstein Bragnum (born 1936), Stockholm. May 10, 2008.

⁸⁰ RGASPI, f. 495, op. 275, d. 284.

⁸¹ Björn Hallström, *Jag trodde på Stalin* (Stockholm: Harrier, 1952), 72–73.

family. The pupils could only speak Swedish, and understood neither Ukrainian nor Russian:

When I [the inspector] asked one student: “Why ... do you not read a Soviet newspaper instead,” the answer translated by his teacher was: “We are tired of reading about socialist competition and polytechnic schools.”⁸²

During the famine in Ukraine in the winter of 1932–1933 the peasants in the Swedish colony were confronted with a dilemma: should they seek assistance from the Soviet authorities or in Sweden? As many other farms in the Kherson district the Swedish *kolkhoz* did not fulfill the exaggerated target for the state grain quota of 1932. As a result the *kolkhoz* Sveriges Kommunistiska Parti was put on a “black list.” The whole stock of grain from the *kolkhoz* and the households belonging to it, including the seed for sowing in 1933, was confiscated. The deliveries of foodstuffs to the local shop were stopped. The *kolkhoz* members no longer received any products in exchange for “workday units.” The specialists servicing the *kolkhoz* were not paid their wages.⁸³ In the fall of 1932, the famine came to the village. People survived on potatoes, fish from the river and gophers from the steppe. Virtually all valuable goods from Sweden were sold: bicycles, sewing machines, and clothes.⁸⁴

The members of the party unit approached the regional committee of the party in Berislav with a request for emergency assistance to the village. The request was refused. That meant that the Swedish communists were not able to help Gammalsvenskby. In a conversation with a member of the Berislav district party committee, one comrade Kabakova, Hugo Lauenstein said that “he did not like the Soviet regime; the authorities arrested people – was that communism and freedom; people were dying in their dozens of hunger – was that democracy?”⁸⁵

Conflicts broke out among the Swedish communists. Kristina Sigalet witnessed a quarrel between Hugo Lauenstein and Edvin Blom. Lauenstein cursed Blom and said that “the worms will eat him alive for luring them to such a terrible place.”⁸⁶

⁸²DAKhO, f. 306, op.1, spr. 279.

⁸³DAKhO, f. R-4033, op. 9, spr. 85.

⁸⁴Interview with Matilda Norberg (born 1919).Roma, Gotland. August 1, 2008.

⁸⁵RGASPI, f. 495 op. 275, d. 341.

⁸⁶Hedman, Åhlander, *Historien*, 262.

In this critical situation the Swedish villagers resorted to a method used by free Swedish farmers for centuries when living conditions had become too hard or in conflicts the local authorities: a collective legal address to the authorities of the state. This method had been used many times before, by the inhabitants of Dagö in the Swedish empire as well as by those of Gammalsvenskby in the Russian empire and the Soviet Union. There are approximately fifteen earlier examples of such collective letters to the authorities, the first of which was written in the seventeenth century.⁸⁷

In January 1933, the *kolkhoz* members secretly started discussing the possibility of moving to Sweden again. They also considered other possibilities. One idea was to ask for help from the German Consulate in Odessa. Some Swedes did not believe it would be possible to move to Sweden again legally and instead suggested it would be better to cross the Soviet-Romanian border illegally. At one meeting, Julius Hansas declared that “I will not die in this kolkhoz as I hope to get to Sweden through Bessarabia.”⁸⁸

Several Swedish women sent letters to relatives in Sweden with stories about the critical condition in the village and begging for help. One example is cited below:

We have sinned against Sweden and the Swedes and we have shown the greatest ingratitude. But, gripped by debilitating nostalgia for our native home, we did not know what we did,. There is no food in the village, no kerosene. There are only Communist books and other rubbish to buy at the shop. Yes, if you are Christian, you have to forgive us. Please, think of our innocent little children.⁸⁹

In addition, the Swedish communists in Gammalsvenskby sent critical letters to Sweden. On behalf of the SKP Gunnar Granlund informed the ECCI on 19 March 1933 that Hugo Lauenstein in letters to his mother-in-law “writes openly counter-revolutionary things directed against the Soviet Union and especially against Svenskby.”⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Jakob Koit, “De svenska dagöböndernas kamp för sin fri- och rättigheter 1662–1685,” *Svio-Estonica* 1951:10, 50–153; Andrej Kotljarchuk, “Nemtsy Ukrainy v sudbakh shvedskoi kolonii na Dnepre, 1805–2007,” in *Voprosy germanskoi istorii*, ed. Svetlana Bobyleva (Dnipropetrovsk: Porogi, 2007), 27–35.

⁸⁸ DAKhO, f. R-4033, op. 4, spr. 359, ark.131

⁸⁹ “Nya nödrop från fränderna i Svenskby,” *Norrköpings Tidningar*, March 3, 1933, 7.

⁹⁰ RGASPI, f. 495 op. 275, d. 341.

As a result, a virtual bomb exploded in the mass media. On 2 March 1933 the oldest liberal newspaper of Sweden *Aftonbladet* published an article, “Djurkadaver och potatisskal mat i Gammalsvenskby” (Animal carcasses and potato peelings – food in Gammalsvenskby), which reported about the terrible famine and the extremely difficult situation of the Gammalsvenskby inhabitants and Swedish communists. On 3 March 1933 the conservative daily *Norrköpings Tidningar* published an article “Nya nödrop från fränderna i Svenskby” (New cries for help from our compatriots in Svenskby) harshly criticizing the Communist project. The article also discussed concrete measures to help the villagers, for example, individual currency transfers through Torgsin.⁹¹ The Swedish Embassy in Moscow approached the German Embassy in Moscow requesting the Germans to investigate what the real situation was in the village through their consulate in Odessa. The embassy also planned to commission a Norwegian entrepreneur to travel to Ukraine to clarify the situation.⁹² The Soviet government was aware of the publications in the Swedish press, probably through their embassy in Stockholm.

The threat of a serious international scandal became real for the Kremlin. It should be noted that the USSR denied the existence of the Ukrainian famine, and there was no information about it in the Soviet newspapers. The Soviet propaganda accused *kulaks* of feigning famine. On 13 March 1933, the political bureau of the Communist Party of Ukraine discussed the situation in the Swedish colony. The Odessa party committee was instructed to take urgent steps to put an end to the famine in Gammalsvenskby. The chief of the Ukrainian GPU Vsevolod Balitsky was ordered “to take measures to introduce immediate measures to stop the information leaks abroad about cases of famine in Gammalsvenskby.”⁹³ The GPU was always quicker to strike; the first arrests in the Swedish colony had already been made on 8 March.

In the beginning of March a list of Swedish villagers who wanted to leave for Sweden was drawn up in Swedish in two copies and sent from the post offices of the cities of Kakhovka and Kherson. The letter from Kakhovka was intercepted by the GPU. The letter sent from Kherson reached the addressee

⁹¹ *Torgsin* (Russian: Торгсин) were state-run hard-currency stores that operated in the USSR between 1931 and 1936. Their name was an acronym of “torgovlia s inostrantsami,” which means “trade with foreigners.”

⁹² RA, Utrikesdepartementet 1920 års dossiersystem. P 1534, Del. 3. Diverse biträde åt utlännningar Gammal-Svenskby bor, 1930-mars 1956.

⁹³ TsDAGO, f. 1, op. 16, spr. 9, ark. 189.

and is today kept in the National Archives of Sweden.⁹⁴ The Soviet secret police were totally surprised that the list was signed by virtually all the villagers, including the local members of the Communist Party and *Komsomol*, as well as some communists from Sweden. When the GPU interrogator asked Petter J. Knutas why he, a communist, had signed the list, Knutas replied: "I signed because there are no supplies in the shop and lately I have been eating potatoes without peeling them, and I don't have any bread anymore."⁹⁵ Mattias Norberg argued "there is no need for kolkhozes, we keep working but we do not have bread, we are hungry, it is better to run an individual farm."⁹⁶ During the interrogation, Alvina Hinas said: "Yes I signed, because we have no bread to feed children, who all the time cry and ask for food."⁹⁷ The explanation for the existence of such "anti-Soviet attitudes" among the locals was, according to the investigators, explained by their kulak origin. However, that argument could hardly be used about the Swedish communists. The 47-year-old Hugo Lauenstein, who was a worker and a communist since 1919, a veteran of the German revolution, and furthermore a Swedish citizen said to the GPU investigators: "I signed the list because it was necessary. My personal opinion is that emigration is not a criminal activity, particularly when the villagers are starving."⁹⁸ Karl Andersson, who prepared the list, declared "as for me personally, I had no plans to go to Sweden, but my situation is too bad here, I haven't received any wages for three months and that is why I have to leave."⁹⁹

In May 1933, two Ukrainian members of the Polish parliament, Milena Rudnitska and Zenon Pelensky, sent a letter to the president of the League of Nations, the Norwegian politician Johan Ludwig Mowinckel. They wrote that Soviet Ukraine had fallen victim to a catastrophe, a famine unequalled in history. However, the Soviet Union denied the famine and the League of Nations did not take any action. Western-Ukrainian politicians have emphasized that among the victims of famine were representatives of several different European peoples: Swedes, Latvians, Estonians and Poles.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ RA, Utrikesdepartementet 1920 års dossiersystem. P 1534, Del.3. Diverse biträde åt utlännningar Gammal-Svenskby bor, 1930-mars 1956.

⁹⁵ DAKhO, f. R-4033, op. 9, spr. 85, arkk.40–41.

⁹⁶ DAKhO, f. R-4033, op. 9, spr. 85, arkk. 36–37.

⁹⁷ DAKhO, f. R-4033, op. 9, spr. 85, ark. 38.

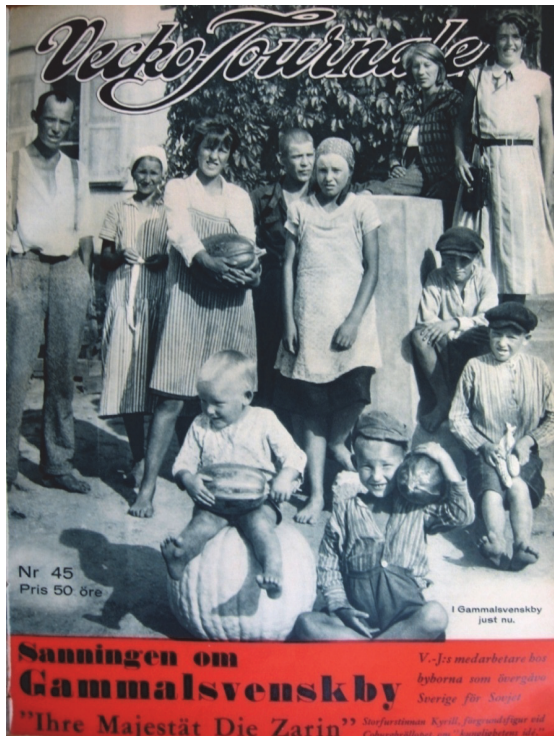
⁹⁸ DAKhO, f. R-4033, op. 9, spr. 85, arkk. 78–79.

⁹⁹ DAKhO, f. R-4033, op. 9, spr. 85, arkk. 21–22.

¹⁰⁰ Vasyi Marochko, "Dyplomatiia zamovchuvannia: stavlennia zakhidnoevropeiskyykh derzhav do Holodomoru 1932–1933 v Ukraini," in *Holod-Henotsyd 1933 roku v Ukraini* (Kyiv: Institut istorii NAN Ukrainy, 2000), 154–158.

Despite the measures taken by the GPU, the information about arrests in Gammalsvenskby reached Sweden. The magazine *Vecko-Journalen* published an article by Alma Braathen “Tjekans hand över Gammalsvenskby” (The Cheka’s hold over Gammalsvenskby) with a detailed story of the arrests in the Swedish village.¹⁰¹ Freelance Alma Braathen had visited Gammalsvenskby during her trip to the USSR in July 1932. Sometime later, a number of her reports were published in Sweden. The tone of her articles was quite neutral, but in private talks with some of the villagers she promised to help them to return to Sweden.

Illustration 4: The Truth about Gammalsvenskby.



Source: Magazine Cover. *Vecko-Journalen* (1932:45). To the article “Sanningen om Gammalsvenskby” (The truth about Gammalsvenskby) by Alma Braathen.

Note: Reporting from a Communist utopia. Leftmost Edvin Bloom, in the center Karl Ture Gräs, rightmost Alma Braathen.

¹⁰¹ Alma Braathen, “Tjekans hand över Gammalsvenskby,” *Vecko-Journalen*, no.19 (1933): 20–21.

On 3 July 1933, *Dagens Nyheter* reported about the fate of one of the arrested Swedish communists, Karl Andersson. On 3 August 1933, the largest daily newspaper in Sweden *Nya Dagligt Allehanda* published a detailed critical report about the trial initiated by the GPU against the Old Swedes under the heading: “Gammal-svenskbybor har deporterats av Sovjet! Tjekans process mot svenskättlingarna ny Vickers-affär” (Inhabitants of Gammalsvenskby have been deported by the Soviets! Cheka process against Swedish descendants is the new Vickers trial).¹⁰² On 4 August 1933 *Borås Tidning* printed an article “Svenskarna leva på svältgränsen i Gammalsvenskby” (Swedes live on the brink of starvation in Gammalsvenskby).

On 26 April 1933, a member of the Swedish Parliament and farmer, Gustaf Olsson, wrote a letter to the Foreign Minister Rickard Sandler requesting he intervene on behalf of the arrested Swedish citizens Karl Andersson and Petter E. Utas. According to Gustaf Olsson, he had received a letter sent from Kristina Utas in Gammalsvenskby with an account of the arrests in the village.¹⁰³

The diplomatic intervention by Sweden changed the course of events. The secret police had been planning a big show trial, and the police of the Kherson district arrested seven men and more than twenty villagers were summoned for interrogation. The prosecutor demanded twelve years' imprisonment for the arrested men and confiscation of their property. However, only four of them were convicted by the special GPU court and the sentence they received was three years' exile. The communist Karl Andersson was released and left for Sweden. With the assistance of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs his wife Maria Andersson (née Utas), who was a Soviet citizen, was given Swedish citizenship and moved to Sweden. However, Petter E. Utas' fate was different. On 18 June 1933 Utas, who had been sentenced to three years' imprisonment, sent a letter appealing for help to the Swedish government. In spite of the support he received from the influential politician Gustaf Olsson, he was denied the right to go back to Sweden. A Swedish citizen since 1931, Utas visited Gammalsvenskby in 1932 as an interpreter and translator for the group of Swedish communists. He was arrested by the GPU, then released but without his Swedish passport. The explanation given was that he had never ceased to be a Soviet citizen and was, therefore, not allowed to renounce his

¹⁰² In March 1933, six British engineers, employed by the company “Metropolitan-Vickers,” were arrested by the GPU on a charge of wrecking and espionage.

¹⁰³ RA, Utrikesdepartementet 1920 års dossiersystem. P 1534, Del.3. Diverse biträde åt utlännningar Gammal-Svenskby boar, 1930-mars 1956.

Soviet citizenship. In 1937, Petter E. Utas was arrested again and disappeared. In fact he was executed following an out-of-court decision by a so-called troika.¹⁰⁴ The Prosecutor General of Ukraine rehabilitated him only in 1999.¹⁰⁵ The place of his burial is still unknown.

The conflict of interests between various Soviet institutions unintentionally benefited the Ukrainian Swedes. When the Holodomor was raging, the GPU tried to limit the contacts the villagers had with foreign countries. However, *Torgsin* employees tried to undo their plans and used to visit Swedish, German and Czech regions urging the people there to write to consulates and relatives abroad pleading for help.¹⁰⁶ The Old Swedes could buy food in *Torgsin* shops in Kakhovka and Kherson for money that they received from Sweden, whether in Swedish *krona* or in other foreign currencies. Alvina Hinas wrote to Sweden after receiving a pound sterling from Gothenburg: "It was an angel of God who came this Easter with a gift to us. For a pound sterling, we got 8 rubles 84 kopecks to buy food."¹⁰⁷

Thanks to the help from Sweden, the people of Gammalsvenskby could survive the famine without a single death, in marked contrast to the neighbouring Ukrainian and Jewish settlements.¹⁰⁸

Conclusions

It is impossible to know how the international Communist project in Röd Svenskby would have developed if the *Holodomor* had not hit the village. Before that catastrophe, the authorities were able to bring about fundamental changes in the traditional life of the Ukrainian Swedes within an extremely short period of time. The first stage of the forced normalization of the Swedish villagers brought considerable results. However, the resistance of the Swedes altered the process of change. The rigid food policy of the Soviet government that caused the famine was a manifestation of weakness rather

¹⁰⁴ *Trojka* means three-man meeting of the local chief for secret police, party secretary and prosecutor.

¹⁰⁵ DAKhO, f.R-4033, op. 4, spr. 359.

¹⁰⁶ Top-secret report of the chief of Ukrainian GPU Vsevolod Balytskii to the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine, May 22, 1934 in: *Nimtsi v Ukraini 1920-1930 20 st. Zbirnik dokumentiv*, ed. Bohdan Chirko (Kyiv: Intel, 1994), no. 87; see also: Vasyl Marochko, "Torgsin: zolota tsina zhyttia ukrainskykh selian u roky holodu (1932–1933)," *Ukrainskyi istorichnyi zhurnal* 2003:3, 90–103.

¹⁰⁷ Hedman, Åhlander, *Historien*, 264.

¹⁰⁸ *Z istorii holodomoru na Khersonshchyni u 1932–1933 rr. Dobirka dokumentiv* (Kherson: DAKhO, 2003); Vasyl Piddubniak, *Zhnyvo Molokha. Holod 1932–1933 rr. na Khersonshchyni* (Kherson: KhMD, 2006), 80.

than strength. The government invested large sums in the agricultural sector but the harvests of the *kolkhozes* were modest. This irritated the authorities, especially compared with the high rate of the budget expense for the agricultural sector. The Ukrainian peasants were left to their fate during the famine. They received no support from outside, and mortality among them was very high. The Swedish villagers were in a better position, not only because of the international status of the Swedish *kolkhoz*. Despite the strict order given to the local authorities to take immediate steps to deal with the famine in the village, the Soviet authorities or the Comintern had done nothing. The rescue came again from Sweden, but it was organized by the peasants themselves. They used the same strategy as they had used for centuries and that enabled Old Swedes to survive the man-made famine without any human loss. Nevertheless, those who had been sentenced to three years' imprisonment in 1933 for organizing the move to Sweden were arrested again in 1937–1938 and executed (except for Alexander Knutas who died in prison in 1935).

The *Holodomor* and the mass arrests put an end to the project of the international Communist movement in Gammalsvenskby. In the beginning of 1934 no Swedish communist remained in the village. A Swedish girl Signe Kaskela met the Holmströms in 1933 in Karelia where she worked in a factory with Svea and Göta Holmström:

They spoke of terrible distress; they lacked bread, although Ukraine was one of Russia's most fertile regions. However, collectivization had fallen on hard times, and despite the severe drought collective farms were still obliged to provide the required quantity of grain to the state... Svea had scurvy and was bleeding from the gums, and had bruises on her legs. Göta was also starving, but not as badly as her sister was.¹⁰⁹

The local Swedish communists were expelled from the party for their support for re-emigration. Soon the authorities replaced the leading staff of the village with ethnic Ukrainians. Makar Shurduk became secretary of the party unit, Dmytro Krakovskyi was appointed chairman of the village Soviet, Leonid Shevchenko became head of local *Komsomol*.

There are no indications in the records dating from 1934 onwards that the local authorities and the Executive Committee of the Comintern wished to revive the Röd Svenskby community. This is an important indicator as it

¹⁰⁹ Signe Kaskela, *Under Stalins diktatur* (Göteborg: Tre böcker, 1990), 26.

supports the thesis about the total change of the course of the Kremlin in early 1930s from World Revolution to isolation. The institutions set up by the communists, i.e. the Swedish school, the Swedish national council and the Swedish kolkhoz existed technically several years on. However, in the course of the national operations of NKVD in 1937–1938, 23 villagers were arrested and executed. All of them were accused of being members of a fictitious Swedish counter-revolutionary nationalistic spy organization. According to the version of the secret police, the leaders of the organization were Edvin Blom and Hugo Lauenstein who from being communists had become agents of the Swedish intelligence service. Not by pure accident, the active members of the socialist construction were also arrested. Among them the former SKP members Petter J. Knutas and Woldemar Utas, as well as the *Komsomol*¹¹⁰ members, the chairman of the kolkhoz Johannes Utas and brigadier Johannes Knutas.¹¹¹

The mass terror was followed by the liquidation of all the national administrative, economic and cultural institutes of Gammalsvenskby: village council, Swedish kolkhoz, Swedish school, library, Swedish leisure interest group and choir.

The Swedish national council was abolished by decree of the political bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine on 16 February 1938. The reason given was that the existence of national districts and village councils was not justified by the ethnic composition of the population.¹¹² Taking the floor on the XIV congress of the Ukrainian communists in June 1938 the new regional leader, Nikita Khrushchev, paid particular attention to the work of the hostile intelligence services within the national schools of Ukraine. He said that the establishment of the so-called national schools had been forced upon Ukraine by agents of Western intelligence services and Ukrainian nationalists. However, these schools did not serve educational purposes but were instead turned into nests for counter-revolutionary work. It is striking that Khrushchev mentioned the one Swedish school in Ukraine in the same contexts as he discussed 180 Jewish, 93 Moldavian, 74 Bulgarian and 16 Greek schools. Apparently the Soviet leaders realized that the fate of the Swedes who had returned to the USSR of their own free will, thereby, as it was seen by public opinion in Sweden, betraying their historical fatherland, would be of little concern to the Swedish

¹¹⁰ *Komsomol* (Kommunisticheskii soiuz molodezhi) – the Union of Communist Youth.

¹¹¹ DAKhO, f. R-4033, op.4, spr.17, 359, 364, 533.

¹¹² *TsK RKP (b)-VKP (b) i natsionalnyi vopros*, t. 2, ed. Liudmila Gatagova (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2005) 378–380.

government. There are no documents in the archives of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs indicating any reaction to the closure of the only Swedish school in the USSR, the dissolution of the Swedish village council or the, for all practical purposes, ethnic cleansing in 1937–1938.

The fates of the Swedish communists after the Gammalsvenskby project varied. The Berislav committee expelled Karl Andersson and Hugo Lauenstein from the party. After a careful official investigation, the personnel department of the ECCI approved the decision. Their party cards are today kept in Moscow. Erik Petersson and Björn Hallström left the party after their return from the USSR. In 1952 Björn Hallström published the book “Jag trodde på Stalin” (I believed in Stalin) condemning the Soviet regime. Sigfrid Holmström took Soviet citizenship and disappeared in the years of the Great Terror. His daughter Göta Holmström (born in 1917) has since the breakup of the Soviet Union been trying to clarify the fate of her father. His case was discussed during question time in the Swedish parliament in 2010.¹¹³

For the young Comintern students Erik Karlsson and Paul Söderman Gammalsvenskby became the starting point of a long successful career. They enjoyed the full confidence of the Comintern and the Soviet government. In 1933 Söderman became editor-in-chief of the leading communist newspaper *Ny Dag* in Sweden. In 1936, he was the leader of the party's campaign to mobilize support for Republican Spain. In the mid-1930s Paul Söderman carried out a special mission as a courier in Scandinavia for the foreign section of the GPU. His Swedish passport is kept in Moscow.¹¹⁴ During the Second World War Paul Söderman was one of the organizers of the Communist resistance, which braced itself for a Nazi occupation that failed to materialize.¹¹⁵

Erik Karlsson worked as an agitator among Norwegian lumbermen in the Arkhangelsk region. In 1933, he became a docent, rector of the Scandinavian sector of the Comintern Party School and head of the Scandinavian broadcasting section of the Radio of the Comintern.¹¹⁶ After the Second World War, Karlsson built an excellent political career in Sweden. For several years, he was a party secretary, a deputy member of the

¹¹³ Kirunasvenskarna. Motion till Riksdagen.2010/11:FP1186. Gunnar Andrén (FP), accessed October 28, 2010, <http://www.riksdagen.se/webbnav/?nid=410&dokid=GY02XFP1186>.

¹¹⁴ RGASPI, f. 495, op. 275, d. 84.

¹¹⁵ Jonas Sjöstedt, “Tystnande motståndsmän,” *Västerbottens-Kuriren*, May 4, 2009.

¹¹⁶ RGASPI, f. 495, op. 275, d. 9, ch. 1–2.

Swedish Parliament. He was considered the party expert on agriculture, and he was the author of the first books on the history of the Swedish communist movement and agrarian problems.¹¹⁷ He died in 1970 glorified as “one of the best known party members, a true Leninist and theoretician of communism.”¹¹⁸ Finally, the leader of the Röd Svenskby commune Edvin Blom remained an active party member until his death in 1953, being at the same time, by a twist of fate, the owner of a farm.¹¹⁹

After their return to Sweden almost all the communists, as well as their wives and grown-up children upon return to Sweden, remained silent about their life in Ukraine. Karl Andersson was the only one to break the rule, and he was soon expelled from the party. He gave a series of interviews to the Swedish media about the catastrophic situation in Gammalsvenskby and the famine in Ukraine. In October 1933 the magazine *Sovjetnytt* published the article “Agronom Andersson och Röda Svenskby” (Agronomist Andersson and Röda Svenskby). The authors wrote that because of Karl Andersson, the bourgeois press demonized the Soviet Union and the collective farm project in Röda Svenskby. As a result, a split occurred in the section of *Sovjetunionens vänner* in Varberg where Andersson had “personal accomplices,” after it had been decided that a committee should be set up to interview the agronomist about the content of the above hostile publications.

The members of the committee published a report, which demonstrated a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of Stalin’s repressive regime and accused Andersson of incompetence:

Andersson claims that there is a famine in Ukraine. He also says that despite all difficulties in 1933 Ukraine had a record harvest, the best in 42 years. How this his statement is correlated with information about the people starving in Ukraine? In fact, he sold himself to the capitalists. Was it not his job as an expert agronomist to improve soil quality and racial management of the agriculture?¹²⁰

After the massive repression by the regime in these years, it was no longer possible to resist the annulment of all the rights of the Swedish minority. Since 1933 the population of the Swedish colony was in deep shock. The

¹¹⁷ Erik Karlsson, *Jordbruksfrågor i svensk politik* (Stockholm: Arbetarkultur, 1936); Erik Karlsson, *Lantarbetarna: löner, arbetstid, bostäder* (Stockholm: Arbetarkultur, 1936).

¹¹⁸ ARAB. Biografica. Vol. 159. Erik Karlsson.

¹¹⁹ Kaa Eneberg, *Förnekelsens barn. Svenskarna som drog österut* (Uddevalla: Hjalmarson & Högberg Bokförlag, 2003), 156.

¹²⁰ “Agronom Andersson och Röda Svenskby,” *Sovjetnytt*, no. 10 (1933): 8–9.

kolkhoz named after *Sveriges Kommunistiska Parti* formally existed formally until 1941. In 1943, the Nazis evacuated the population of Gammalsvenskby as *Volksdeutsche* to the Third Reich.¹²¹ In 1945, a part of Swedes (around sixty individuals) emigrated from Germany to Sweden. Another group was deported from the Soviet zone in Germany to the Komi-Gulag.¹²² Those who returned found their home village completely changed. In connection with the campaign in 1945 to change the names of the former German colonies, Gammalsvenskby received a new Slavonic name, Verbivka, and soon the colony disappeared entirely as it was included in the new large Ukrainian village of Zmiivka (the former German colony of Schlangendorf). The Old-Swedish *kolkhoz* was renamed, in the typical Soviet manner, after the aviator Valerii Chkalov. After twelve years, the dream of building a little Red Sweden in Ukraine had become a blank spot on the map and in the historical memory.

¹²¹ David Gaunt, "Swedes of Ukraine as Volksdeutsche. The experience of World War 2," in *Voprosy germanskoi istorii*, ed. Svetlana Bobyleva (Dnipropetrovsk: Porogi, 2007), 239–250.

¹²² Andrej Kotljarchuk, "Ukrainasvenskar i Gulagarkipelagen. Tvångsnormaliseringens teknik och kollektivt motstånd," *Historisk Tidskrift*, no. 1 (2011).