The Black Hole in Ukraine

Contributed by V.I. Postnikov
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I have had a long presentiment about Ukraine being the black hole for humanity. Probably it first was felt after the Chernobyl disaster. (Chernobyl translates into English as "a Black True Story" and "Wormwood.") Lately, my presentiment has only been strengthened.

The black hole has literally been dug by humans themselves. To explain this, let me turn to more history.

Ukraine historically is the land where nature accumulated one of the richest deposits of coal and ores, and some of the most fertile soil on earth. This fact lies at the root of the contradiction between the pastoral nature of Ukrainians and the industrial development imposed on them first by the Russian Empire, and then by the Soviets. The riches of the land had already been squandered by the end of the 20th century.

The industrial exploitation and application of coal and ores in the Donbass region (DONetsk Coal BASSein, for short) had begun as early as the first half of the 19th century. The first metallurgical industries were built in Luhansk circa 1800 for military purposes. Then industrialization was accelerated for building the railroads, which, in turn, linked the deposits of ores and coal. This "positive" feedback is well-known for many countries, England's being the most conspicuous example.

At the turn of the 20th century, the Donbass region had become the primary source of energy for the Russian Empire, and catered to the growing capitalism. Yet, Ukraine remained an agrarian country where peasants have always felt at odds with creeping industrialization.

Soon after the 1917 revolution, the clashes between different factions of the Ukrainian population (nationalists, peasants, Bolsheviks, monarchists, et al) took the most devastating form and led to the civil war (1918-1921). The prairies of Ukraine were largely the epicenter of these clashes. Eventually, the Bolsheviks got the upper hand.

The idea of industrialization had always been on the agenda of the Bolsheviks (Lenin in particular), with Ukraine viewed as a major engine for progress, because of its rich lands, good climate and close proximity to the West. Electrification was the buzz word, and the old Dnieper river had to be sacrificed. Dneproges, a monster hydro station with a huge dam, was imposed in the way of the sacred river. The first five generators were from the General Electric Co., bought from the sales of wheat -- while millions of peasants starved in Ukraine and Russia. It is also noteworthy that prior to WWII, there was extensive trade with Germany Germany. The first power stations that provided machinery in Ukraine were equipped with German electric equipment exchange for wheat. The first power stations in Ukraine were equipped with German electric equipment.

Germans were well aware of Ukraine’s riches, fossil fuels and fertile land. They even considered populating Ukraine with Germans within the infamous doctrine of Lebensraum. During the occupation, trains were packed with soil and sent to Germany.

After the war, the industrialization had an even more accelerated pace. Now, the underlying idea was competition with

the West. Ukraine's eastern part was literally stuffed with different industries -- extractive, metallurgical, chemical, machine-building, etc., with extensive railroad networks and power stations. This is where the war is now raging.

With growing population and ecological deterioration, the social collapse was inevitable, and it was only a matter of time.

The coal mines gradually had become less profitable, with the most valuable coal -- anthracite -- less accessible, and the region had to be subsidized to keep the miners busy and to supply coal to thermal power stations (located largely in the Donbass area). So the economy began to stumble. The stakes were made on nuclear power, and that too turned fatal; e.g., Chernobyl which caused intractable problems including human casualties and nebulous financial costs. Ukraine has the worst nuclear legacy in the world (the Fukushima disaster is still being evaluated), and has excessive electric power that it can't handle. To come to terms with the oversized nukes -- 19 nuclear reactors; still more planned; nuclear stations' capacity is 13 GW, covering 50% of electricity production -- it was decided to build huge reservoirs for the hydro-pumped stations that can regulate the base load. So large swathes of fertile and beautiful lands in the southern part of the nation had to be inundated. This significantly worsened ecological health and displaced thousands of people.

Thus, the people in the eastern Ukraine found themselves in a trap. The smoldering cities, poisoned earth and water, soulless work in the mines and machine-building industries, early deaths and ills of all sorts, including increased levels of crime in the region, have morphed into the present civil war.

Nonetheless, the causes for the war were explained differently, depending on the political camp you're in. All these ills were attributed to "others," such as nationalists, the West, "fascists," Russia, Putin, etc. Russia, which is suffering from the same disease, has picked this "explanation," and once again turned aggressively against the West.

More light has to be shed on the current war in Ukraine. The industrial Eastern part has had a significant share in the economy of the country. For example, the machine-building industry supplied Russia with military spare parts, turbines and generators. Gradually, the key industries were privatized by oligarchs having close relations with Russia. Their interests were largely represented in the Ukrainian Parlaiment by a Party of Regions headed by Viktor Yanoukovich (himself from Donetsk). The Association with the European Union would mean the end of their rule. Therefore, it was a matter of life or death for the power holders.

After its defeat in WWI, Germany, who got 1.2 million of its own killed, found itself in a similar position to Ukraine. The humiliated population, ruined economy, and fits of patriotism led to WWII (over 60 million killed overall).

How many more people will perish in the gaping black hole in the eastern Ukraine?

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