

HOLT & DISTRICT FARMERS' CLUB

FOUNDED 1948

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CLUB MATTERS Beware The Ideas of Marx

Today, The Ides of March, is renowned for the assassination of Julius Caesar whose name was appropriated by the Russians for their rulers, the Czars. Perhaps the Ukrainians now have similar thoughts to those of our ancestors in 55 B.C. and we might hope that history could repeat itself. *Et tu Brute ? Then fall, Caesar.*

Martin Jensen has been good enough to provide some background to his farming operation in western Ukraine so that we might gain better appreciation of what is happening on the ground amidst all the awful war reports. He farms almost 6000 acres (2400 hectares) covering 4 villages in the north-west of the country about 50 k from the Polish border and little more than an hour from Kyiv. Even here the Russian threat is ever present with the bombing last weekend of the military base at Yavoriv which is only about 12 k from the same border. The land tenure is similar to what we found with **Bill Poortvliet** when we visited Hungary with its Golden Crown system. Martin has 1800 landlords since most Ukrainian landlords own a 'pais' of between one and two hectares. The farming is all arable with spring and winter wheat, spring barley, sugar beet, soya, oilseed rape, buckwheat and some rye. They use 30m tramlines and some strip tilling but plans for a new grain store have had to be put on hold. He has a staff of 25 people including night watchmen to guard the machinery compound.



It is all to do with the Black Earth - *chernozem* – which is some of the richest soil in the world. These are the *steppes* – huge expanses that were grassland until steel tipped ploughs were introduced two hundred years ago. Traditional wooden ploughs could not break through the upper levels of soil which were thoroughly entangled with roots. Hereby there is a high percentage of humus as well as high levels of phosphorus and ammonia so that no fertiliser is required. Also there is loam over chalk so that the land is free draining and, Martin observes, free from flints. This Black Earth extends through about two thirds of the Ukraine and has made it the bread basket for Russia and much of Europe. At the turn of the nineteenth century the wheat exports provided the money for Russia's industrial revolution.

This is where the history also turns black. The Russian Revolution led to the collectivization of Ukrainian farming under Soviet 5 year plans pursued by Stalin and the awful irony was that there was widespread famine as not enough wheat was saved for domestic consumption. With all their land and livestock taken it has been estimated that as many as 7 million Ukrainians died from starvation. Stalin's non aggression pact with Hitler in 1939 meant that the Ukrainian population of about 40 million was confronted with two of the worst tyrannies in history. When Hitler broke the pact in 1941 they were in the way of his Drive to the East. At first they welcomed the Nazis but Hitler viewed them as Untermensch (sub-humans) and sought to decimate the population in order to create a new Lebensraum (living space) for the Third Reich. He continued the collectivization with 'co-operative farms', transported large numbers back to Germany to work in munitions factories all the while, prompted by Goering, establishing concentration camps and committing genocide on a vast scale. The Red Army suffered one of the biggest defeats in history at the Battle of Kiev and adopted a scorched earth policy in their retreat taking some 6 million cattle and 300,000 tractors with them.



But for the Ukrainians this was not the end of it; for them it was out of the frying pan into the fire and then back into the frying pan. After 3 years of German occupation the Battle of Stalingrad meant the Nazis being forced back through The Ukraine and ransacking the country's cultural heritage as they fled; anything that could not be removed was destroyed. The statistics are horrendous. The Ukraine suffered the largest number of civilian casualties in the Second World War and, including the military, the total losses may have been about 10 million or one quarter of the population. Two thirds died from hunger and disease and this represents 20% of the total number of worldwide casualties during World War II. These figures are reckoned to have included about 600,000 Ukrainian Jews which amounts to one tenth of the number lost in The Holocaust. The Ukrainian experience is especially tragic since, unlike The Holocaust or the story of Soviet sacrifice, it is a largely unpublicized page of history. The subsequent 77 years have not been particularly kind either; the help that has been proffered over recent weeks has been unbelievably hard earned.

Tim

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