



Correspondence Between
Markian Pelech
and the
Board of the Pulitzer Prizes
Regarding Walter Duranty's
1932 Pulitzer Prize

(December 30, 2002 - April 28, 2003)



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40 Manor Drive
Hillsborough, NJ 08844
Tel: 732-236-4175
December 30, 2002

Sig Gissler, Administrator
The Pulitzer Prizes
Columbia University
709 Journalism Building
2950 Broadway
New York, NY 10027

Re: The 1932 Pulitzer Prize to Walter Duranty

During 1932-1933 the government of the Soviet Union forcibly requisitioned grain from areas of Ukraine and the Caucasus and cordoned off the areas to prevent food from reaching the population. About seven million persons are estimated to have died as a result of this deliberate policy of starvation. These actions were intended to force the peasants into collective farms and to break Ukrainian nationalism.

This Soviet policy falls into the category of genocide as defined by the United Nations' *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (December 9, 1948): "genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group." Robert Conquest has described the Soviet Terror Famine of 1932-1933 (*The Harvest of Sorrow, Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine*. Oxford University Press, 1986).

The 1932 winner of the Pulitzer Prize in the category Correspondence was Walter Duranty of the New York Times, "For his series of dispatches on Russia especially the working out of the Five Year Plan."

In his reports Duranty downplayed the impact of food shortages in Ukraine and the Caucasus or simply denied that there was a famine in these areas, although he visited the famine areas in 1933. In private, Duranty told the British embassy that several million persons had died of famine in Ukraine and the Caucasus.

While other Western reporters reported on the famine conditions as best as they could (due to Soviet censorship and restrictions on visits to the famine areas), Duranty acted more like a spokesman for the Soviet government than an independent reporter for a Western newspaper.

The Attitude of the New York Times

In 1986 the publisher of the New York Times, Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, refused to give up the Pulitzer Prize awarded to Duranty, because "it is not a prize the Times can take back." Yet, the New York Times' publication *Written into History* admits that Duranty's

coverage that resulted in his receiving the Prize has been discredited by other writers in the Times and elsewhere. Duranty's contemporary, the English reporter Malcolm Muggeridge, who was in the famine areas at the same time, called Duranty, "the greatest liar of any journalist I have met in fifty years of journalism."

What about the Pulitzer Committee?

The Pulitzer Prizes' webpage (<http://www.pulitzer.org/History/history.html>) lists the criteria for the award of the Prizes. The criteria I examined were for 2002. I did not see any mention of deliberately fabricating untruths as a criteria for winning the Prize. The choice facing the Board of the Pulitzer Prizes is clear:

- Determine that the Pulitzer Prize awarded to Walter Duranty should be withdrawn, with well-publicized explanations of why the prize is being withdrawn.
- or
- Explain why they are unable to remove Duranty from the roll of honor of journalism that the Pulitzer Prizes purport to be. And this explanation should be made in well-publicized communications to prestigious media throughout the country.

If the Board has qualms about withdrawing the Prize awarded to Duranty, let them explain publicly whether they would have the same qualms if a Prize had been mistakenly awarded to a contemporary journalist who deliberately denied one of the following:

1. The Turkish massacre of Armenians at the beginning of the last century.
2. The Nazi Holocaust against the Jews in the 1940s.
3. The genocide that took place in Bosnia in recent years.

If the Board would have no qualms about withdrawing an award in these instances, please explain what makes the case of the 1932-1933 Ukrainian Famine different?

In 1981, Janet Cooke, a reporter at the Washington Post, won a Pulitzer Prize for her stories about a small boy caught up in the drug trade in Washington, D.C. When Cooke later admitted that she had invented the small boy, she was deprived of the Prize and disappeared from reporting. There is no mention of her on the Pulitzer Prizes' webpage. Is the fabrication of one life worse than the denial of millions of deaths?

The Janet Cooke incident also shows that there is precedent for withdrawing the Pulitzer Prize. Can the current Board consider whether it would be the decent thing to withdraw the Prize awarded to Walter Duranty?

Sincerely,

Markian Pelech, Ph.D.

40 Manor Drive
Hillsborough, NJ 08844
Tel.: 732-236-4175
eMail: pelechm@yahoo.com
January 3, 2003

Mr. Andrew Barnes
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
St. Petersburg Times
Times Publishing Co.
490 1st Ave. S.
P.O. Box 1121
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

Dear Mr. Barnes:

I am writing to you in your capacity as a member of the Board of the Pulitzer Prizes.

I have sent the attached letter to Mr. Sig Gissler, the Administrator of the Prizes, and other members of the Board.

In brief, the letter brings the attention of the Board to the following:

- In 1932 and 1933, the government of the Soviet Union followed a policy of deliberate starvation in Ukraine and the Caucasus to force collectivization and break Ukrainian nationalism.
- The 1932 winner of the Pulitzer Prize in the category Correspondence was Walter Duranty of the New York Times, "For his series of dispatches on Russia especially the working out of the Five Year Plan." In his reports, Duranty downplayed the famine or denied that it was taking place, although he visited the famine areas and privately told the British embassy that several million persons had died of starvation.

I request that you discuss this matter with the other members of the Board to determine whether the Pulitzer Prize awarded to Walter Duranty should be withdrawn for unprofessional, dishonest and immoral reporting.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at the above address, telephone number, or eMail address.

Sincerely,

Markian Pelech, Ph.D.

Yahoo! Mail - pelechm@yahoo.com - Microsoft Internet Explorer provided by Tollgrade_Communications, Inc.

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Address http://us.f404.mail.yahoo.com/ym/ShowLetter?MsgId=1727_6951356_15751_1253_945_0_3368_-1_0&YY=40212&inc=25&order=down&sort=date&pos=0&view=a&head=b&box=Hold Go Links

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Date: Thu, 6 Feb 2003 16:35:15 -0500 (EST)
From: "Sig Gissler" <sg138@columbia.edu> | [This is Spam](#) | [Add to Address Book](#)
To: "Markian Pelech" <pelechm@yahoo.com>
Subject: Walter Duranty

Dear Mr. Pelech:

Your Jan. 3, 2003 letter to Pulitzer Prize Board members regarding Walter Duranty of the New York Times and his Pulitzer Prize in 1932 has been duly noted.

My predecessor as administrator says that complaints about the prize for Mr. Duranty have been raised on and off through the years. However, to date, the Pulitzer Board has not seen fit to reverse a previous Board's decision that now stretches back 70 years.

In your letter you refer to Mr. Duranty's neglect of the Soviet famine of 1932 and 1933. It might be helpful for you to know that, contrary to some impressions, Mr. Duranty's prize in 1932 was for a specific set of stories in the previous year - namely, 1931.

Sincerely,

Sig Gissler
Administrator

Sig Gissler, administrator
Pulitzer Prizes
Graduate School of Journalism
Columbia University
2950 Broadway
New York, NY 10027
Phone: 212-854-7327; Fax: 212-854-3342

Done Internet

40 Manor Drive
Hillsborough, NJ 08844
February 15, 2003

Mr. Sig Gissler, Administrator
Pulitzer Prizes
Graduate School of Journalism
Columbia University
2950 Broadway
New York, NY 10027

Dear Mr. Gissler,

Thank you for your eMail in reply to my letter concerning Walter Duranty mailed to the Pulitzer Prize Board on January 3, 2003. The fact that it is an eMail from you, however, carries no assurance that it reflects the opinion of the Board. I assume, therefore, that this is your private opinion and will limit my remarks to you. I will reiterate Walter Duranty's career and then address your very interesting comments in detail.

Walter Duranty's Career in Moscow

Taking Walter Duranty's career lightly shows a serious lack of awareness of his influence on Western opinion and of the damage he caused through his influence.

Walter Duranty was the correspondent of the *New York Times* in Moscow from 1920 to 1934. His reports from Moscow place him in the tribe of Westerners that Lenin referred to as "useful idiots" – opportunists and misguided idealists with seriously flawed morals who hid the crimes of Lenin and Stalin from their Western readers. The idealists felt that showing the true cost of building socialism would alienate the workers of the West from socialism. Duranty appears to have had no particular convictions. He lied only to ingratiate himself with the Soviet regime and prolong his stay in Moscow.

As an "idiot", Duranty was one of those instrumental in misleading some segments of Western public opinion into viewing the Soviet Union as a benign regime presided over by a benevolent Josef Stalin (I refer you to S.J. Taylor's, *Stalin's Apologist*, Walter Duranty: *The New York Times's Man in Moscow*. Oxford University Press, 1990). Duranty and his "idiot" ilk kept Stalin's reputation shiny so that he was compared favorably to his German counterpart Adolf Hitler. Only in the latter part of the 20th century did writers like Boris Pasternak, Alexander Solzhenitsin, Robert Conquest and

countless others bring the crimes of Lenin and Stalin to the attention of wide segments of the Western public.

In 1932 Duranty won a Pulitzer Prize for his reporting in 1931 of the Soviet Five-Year Plan. By this time he had long been writing more as an apologist for Stalin than as a reporter of an independent Western newspaper. Even the New York Times admits that, “Other writers in The Times and elsewhere have discredited this coverage” (see www.nytc.com/company-awards-times.html). Nonetheless, the management of the *Times* has repeatedly refused to follow the example of the *Washington Post* in the case of Janet Cooke and return Duranty’s Prize, one of 87 garnered by the newspaper between 1918 and 2002. Apparently keeping a high score is more important than ethics for the management of the *Times*.

Duranty repaid the Pulitzer Board and the American public with one of the most shameful episodes in American reporting – the cover-up of the Ukrainian famine in 1932 – 1933.

My Response to Your Message

Your eMail would make a passable press release for the uninformed and uninterested. I find it lacking in substance. But, you do make some very interesting admissions.

My predecessor as administrator says that complaints about the prize for Mr. Duranty have been raised on and off through the years. However, to date, the Pulitzer Board has not seen fit to reverse a previous Board's decision that now stretches back 70 years.

Please note very carefully. These are not complaints that are being brought before the Pulitzer Prize Board. These are charges and accusations of unethical, immoral, and unprofessional conduct on the part of Duranty.

So, you admit that previous Pulitzer Boards have been aware of the facts of the matter and lacked the ethical and moral integrity required to do the right thing about Duranty? Is that it? And you wish to follow in this unholy tradition?

The inactivity of previous Boards explains why this matter is being brought before the Board once again after 70 years. It is not a justification for the inaction of previous Boards or your own.

How are “70 years” relevant to the matter? Is there a time period when Truth becomes Untruth? Do moral, ethical, and professional considerations become dulled after a certain period of time?

Seventy years is within my father’s lifetime and no doubt your father’s lifetime. 58 years after the Holocaust there are those who would deny this catastrophic tragedy. Duranty was among those who prevented the Ukrainian horror from coming to light. I would so like to hear by what sophistry you would distinguish these two modes of conduct.

to date, the Pulitzer Board has not seen fit to reverse a previous Board's decision that now stretches back 70 years.

What does “not seen fit” mean? This implies that previous Boards condoned Duranty’s behavior and, by extension, Stalin’s crimes that Duranty helped conceal. Do you?

In your letter you refer to Mr. Duranty's neglect of the Soviet famine of 1932 and 1933.

Neglect? Sir, you may neglect to pay your telephone bill on time, or you may neglect a guest at a dinner party. Duranty was much more active than the passive-sounding “neglect” implies. He devoted a great deal of effort to concealing the famine from the Western public and, indeed, led the way among Western reporters.

- Duranty wrote articles denying that a famine was taking place in Ukraine and the Caucasus.
- Duranty wrote denunciations of those who wrote about the famine, accusing them of being reactionaries and anti-Bolshevik propagandists.
- Duranty continued in this mode even after visiting the famine areas.
- In private, Duranty informed the British embassy that several million had died of hunger in Ukraine and the Caucasus.
- Duranty never retracted what he had written – even after leaving the Soviet Union.

Neglect?

- *It might be helpful for you to know that, contrary to some impressions, Mr. Duranty's prize in 1932 was for a specific set of stories in the previous year - namely, 1931.*

Why should this be “helpful” for me?

Bulk [Empty]

Trash [Empty]

My Folders [Hide]

Hold

Check your Credit
in Seconds!

Access Your Office
Files
from Home

FREE fax number
for your Yahoo! Mail

Save on
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Date: Thu, 6 Feb 2003 14:35:15 -0500 (EST)

From: "Sig Gissler" <sg138@columbia.edu> | [This is Spam](#) | [Add to Address Book](#)

To: "Markian Pelech" <pelechm@yahoo.com>

Subject: Walter Duranty

Dear ^PMr. Pelech:

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Sincerely,

Sig Gissler
Administrator

Sig Gissler, administrator
Pulitzer Prizes
Graduate School of Journalism
Columbia University
2950 Broadway
New York, NY 10027
Phone: 212-854-7327; Fax: 212-854-3342

40 Manor Drive
Hillsborough, NJ 08844
February 15, 2003

Mr. Andrew Barnes, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
St. Petersburg Times
Times Publishing Co.
490 1st Ave. S.
P.O. Box 1121
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

Dear Mr. Barnes,

I received the attached eMail from Mr. Gissler, Administrator of the Pulitzer Prizes, and can only state that I have no assurance that this reflects the opinion of the Board. I attach my reply to Mr. Gissler.

I ask you to familiarize yourself with Walter Duranty's career. Aside from Robert Conquest's *Harvest of Sorrow* (Oxford University Press, 1986) and S.J. Taylor's *Stalin's Apologist* (Oxford University Press, 1990), there are many sites devoted to him on the Internet. I enclose a small selection.

Consider the evidence and determine how you would reply to the questions I posed to Mr. Gissler.

Please bear in mind that this is an issue that touches on the moral, ethical and professional integrity of the Pulitzer Prizes.

I urge the Board to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the tragedy of the Famine of 1932-1933 by ending this scandalous episode in the history of the Pulitzer Prizes and revoking Walter Duranty's Prize.

Sincerely,

Markian Pelech, Ph.D.

40 Manor Drive
Hillsborough, NJ 08844
February 28, 2003

Mr. Andrew Barnes
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
St. Petersburg Times
Times Publishing Co.
490 1st Ave. S.
P.O. Box 1121
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

Dear Mr. Barnes:

The following information has recently come to my attention.

During a visit to Berlin in June 1931, Walter Duranty informed A.W. Klieforth of the US Embassy there that, "in agreement with The New York Times and the Soviet authorities, his official dispatches always reflect the official opinion of the Soviet regime and not his own." (Leonard Leshuk, US Intelligence Perceptions of Soviet Power 1921-46 (London, Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), Footnote #87, citing Gordon dispatch, 5 June 1931, National Archives Record Group 59 861.5017 LC/268.)

1931 was the year in which Walter Duranty wrote the articles which won him the Pulitzer Prize in 1932. The State Department memo quoted above proves that Duranty repeated Soviet propaganda without verifying its veracity. This constitutes sufficient reason to revoke the Prize awarded to Duranty.

If the Board does not agree with my conclusion, kindly inform me what would constitute sufficient grounds for removing Duranty from the rolls of the Pulitzer Prizes.

Sincerely,

Markian Pelech, Ph.D.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

The Pulitzer Prizes

OFFICE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR

Dr. Markian Pelech
40 Manor Drive
Hillsborough, NJ 08844

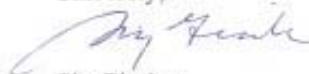
March 17, 2003

Dear Dr. Pelech:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your latest letter about Walter Duranty, sent to President Lee Bollinger and apparently to other Pulitzer Prize Board members.

The item you sent along – apparently taken from an old State Department communication – will be placed on file with other letters we have received recently. As I have reported, the Board is aware of complaints about the award to Mr. Duranty. To date, it has not seen fit to reverse a 70-year-old decision. At this point, I have nothing further to add.

Sincerely,



Sig Gissler
Administrator

40 Manor Drive
Hillsborough, NJ 08844
April 7, 2003

Mr. Sig Gissler, Administrator
Pulitzer Prizes
Graduate School of Journalism
Columbia University
2950 Broadway
New York, NY 10027

Dear Mr. Gissler,

Thank you for your letter of March 17, 2003.

At this point, you may have nothing further to add about Walter Duranty.

However, as Administrator of the Pulitzer Prizes you should be able to advise me of the Board's guidelines for having Walter Duranty's Pulitzer Prize revoked.

Sincerely,

Markian Pelech, Ph.D.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

The Pulitzer Prizes

OFFICE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR

Dr. Markian Pelech
40 Manor Drive
Hillsborough, NJ 08844

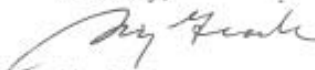
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Sincerely,



Sig Gissler
Administrator

*charges regarding Walter
Duranty's serious unethical
and unprofessional conduct.*

40 Manor Drive
Hillsborough, NJ 08844
April 7, 2003

Dear Mr. Gissler,

Your reply to my letter is a repetition of your first letter. I would have thought that an institution of the caliber of the Pulitzer Prizes would have reacted with some show of concern about the character of the winners of their awards.

In your first letter, you stated that your predecessor as administrator informed you about the complaints against the Duranty award. As I stated in my reply, these are not complaints but charges of unethical and unprofessional conduct by Duranty. (I assume that ghostwriting for Stalin by a *New York Times* reporter who then sent the results as dispatches to the *Times* is unethical).

You concluded your second letter with "At this time, I have nothing further to add." I would hazard to state that you know nothing about Walter Duranty, and therefore have no way of answering the questions I posed about him in my second letter. You would probably lose any debate about him in any forum.

Before you rush to repeat the "haven't seen fit" and "70 years old" phraseology of your press releases, I suggest that you educate yourself about Walter Duranty. A much shorter work than the ponderous studies by Robert Conquest and S.J. Taylor is James William Crowl's *Angels in Stalin's Paradise. Western Reporters in Soviet Russia, 1917 to 1937, A Case Study of Louis Fisher and Walter Duranty*. University Press of America 1982. As Administrator of the Pulitzer Prizes, you should have some familiarity with a rogue that has crept into your hall of excellence.

After learning something about Duranty, read the dispatches that won him his Prize – I am sure they are readily available to you. If you need to place those dispatches in context, read Conquest, any recent history of collectivization and the Soviet Union. For contrast, read the articles by Duranty's contemporaries, Gareth Jones and Malcolm Muggeridge (http://colley.co.uk/garethjones/soviet_articles/soviet_articles.htm).

Only then may you debate the ethical and professional issues of keeping Duranty on the Pulitzer roll. If you are "much too busy", assign it to a graduate assistant.

Until you have done that, kindly don't send any more "previous boards have not seen fit to reverse a 70- year old decision" missives. They are juvenile evasions and beneath the dignity of a person in your position, and they don't impress me.

Sincerely,

Markian Pelech, Ph.D.

40 Manor Drive
Hillsborough, NJ 08844
April 7, 2003

To the Board of the Pulitzer Prizes

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I received a response from Mr. Gissler to my second and third letters to the Board. Once again, the participation of the Board is not indicated.

I am therefore turning to the members of the Board with the attached questionnaire, containing two high-level questions. I enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope to facilitate your reply.

I have a deadline for an article about the Duranty Prize and the Pulitzer Board due at the end of May and would like to be able to report a 100% response. A reply by mid-May would be appreciated.

Sincerely,

Markian Pelech, Ph.D.

**Survey of Members of the Board of the Pulitzer Prizes regarding
Ethical and Professional Standards of the Pulitzer Prizes, April 7, 2003**

Response from Mr. Paul Steiger

I agree that deliberate falsifying of news reports with omissions of relevant facts or the inclusion of fabrications is contrary to the principles promoted by the Pulitzer Prizes.

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

I agree that genocide denial by a reporter while the genocide is occurring is contrary to the principles promoted by the Pulitzer Prizes.

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

I allow my name to be used in reporting the results of this survey.

NOTE: In the event of a 'No' response, the responses to this survey will be reported only in summary numbers, without identifying the respondent.

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Note: Lack of a reply will be summarized as such, without identifying those who did not reply.

40 Manor Drive
Hillsborough, NJ 08844
April 21, 2003

To the Board of the Pulitzer Prizes

Re: Mr. Gissler's Insensitive Statements

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Board:

I have been writing at you since January 2003, about Walter Duranty, and with one exception you have maintained absolute silence.

Instead you have allowed Mr. Sig Gissler to act as your spokesman. Mr. Gissler has been a very poor choice.

In his replies to me Mr. Gissler has shown no interest in discussing Duranty or learning more about the charges against Duranty. This smug know-nothing arrogance is undignified for the Pulitzer Prizes. What may appear as clever argumentation is actually inane.

Mr. Gissler has differentiated the Prize as being awarded for the articles written in 1931 (tainted as they were by propaganda for Stalin) from the genocide-denial that Duranty was guilty of in 1932 and 1933. A similar statement by him was recently quoted in the *Washington Times* of March 29, 2003.

These statements imply that Mr. Gissler has no objections to genocide-denial. Aside from demonstrating questionable logic and ethics, this is extremely offensive to the millions of victims of the Famine. I have asked Mr. Gissler on two occasions how he would compare Duranty's actions to present-day Holocaust denial. Mr. Gissler did not reply, but I dare say that Mr. Gissler would not speak or write like this about Holocaust denial.

Mr. Gissler is in dire need of sensitivity training. Is this the kind of statement that Columbia University wants being made in its name, Mr. Bollinger? Does this attitude coincide with that of the Board of the Pulitzer Prizes, Ms. Rowe?

Sincerely,

Markian Pelech, Ph.D.

40 Manor Drive
Hillsborough, NJ 08844
April 28, 2003

Prof. Lee C. Bollinger, President
Office of the President
Columbia University
2960 Broadway
New York, NY 10027-6902

Cc: Sig Gissler

Re: Mr. Gissler's Insensitive Statements

Dear Prof. Bollinger:

I have been writing to the Pulitzer Board about Walter Duranty since January 2003, and with one exception they have maintained absolute silence.

Instead they have allowed Mr. Sig Gissler to act as their spokesman. Mr. Gissler has been a very poor choice.

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Mr. Gissler is in dire need of sensitivity training. Is this the kind of statement that Columbia University wants made in its name, Mr. Bollinger?

Sincerely,

Markian Pelech, Ph.D.

40 Manor Drive
Hillsborough, NJ 08844
April 28, 2003

Ms. Sandra Mims Rowe, Editor
Chair, The Pulitzer Board
The Oregonian
Oregonian Publishing Co.
1320 SW Broadway
Portland, OR 97201-3469

Cc: Sig Gissler

Re: Mr. Gissler's Insensitive Statements

Dear Ms. Rowe:

I have been writing to the Pulitzer Board about Walter Duranty since January 2003, and with one exception they have maintained absolute silence.

Instead they have allowed Mr. Sig Gissler to act as their spokesman. Mr. Gissler has been a very poor choice.

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Mr. Gissler is in dire need of sensitivity training. Do these sentiments match those of the Pulitzer Board, Ms. Rowe?

Sincerely,

Markian Pelech, Ph.D.

40 Manor Drive
Hillsborough, NJ 08844
April 28, 2003

To the Board of the Pulitzer Prizes

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I have been writing to you about Walter Duranty since January 2003. Your dead silence has been thoroughly rude and insulting:

- To me
- To the prestige of the Pulitzer Prizes
- To the countless victims of Stalin's crimes, which Walter Duranty did his utmost to conceal

I would hazard to say that before January 2003, you had never heard of Walter Duranty or at least not thought about him much. Mr. Safire may be an exception to this, being at the *Times* for many years.

Since my first contact, you have learned the following.

- From 1922 till 1930 Duranty had been shilling for Joseph Stalin, one might even say ghostwriting for Joseph. Walter covered up or made light of every crime of the Georgian.
- In June 1931, Duranty admitted to the staff at the U.S. embassy in Berlin that "in agreement with the New York Times and the Soviet authorities his official dispatches always reflected the official opinion of the Soviet regime, not his own." June 1931 was the month during which Duranty sent to the *Times* most of the dispatches that earned him a Pulitzer Prize in 1932. Stalin may just as well have picked up the prize, but, oh yes, his business was not reporting the news but rather making it with mass murder and other mayhem.
- Duranty followed up his 'win' by thoroughly debasing Western journalism. In 1932 he ignored and in 1933 he denied the famine deliberately created by Stalin in Ukraine and the Caucasus. The death rate was several million, a good part of them children. This famine constituted genocide. Thus Duranty added genocide denial to his resume.

From your reaction I can safely say that not one of you has had the interest to do any study of Duranty, although I pointed you to several books about him. Thus, you have remained uninformed and uninterested.

You have allowed Mr. Sig Gissler to act as your spokesman in this matter, a poor choice, if I might say. Mr. Gissler admitted that past Pulitzer Boards were aware of 'complaints' about the award to Duranty but had not seen fit to reverse a 70-year old decision. Mr. Gissler, I don't care whether past Boards had the morals of alleycats. My letters were addressed to you and the current Board. And as I told you several times, these are very

serious charges against Duranty's unethical and unprofessional conduct, not 'complaints' about his award.

Further, Mr. Gissler assured me that the Pulitzer Prize awarded to Duranty was for his articles in 1931. Mr. Gissler made the same distinction in a statement quoted in the Washington Times on March 29, 2003 (p. 1). Mr. Gissler therefore creates the impression that he has no problem with genocide denial. (Mr. Gissler, you may reply any time you like.)

I therefore felt justified sending a survey to the members of the Board, asking them to answer Yes or No to the following two statements.

- I agree that deliberate falsifying of news reports with omissions of relevant facts or the inclusion of fabrications is contrary to the principles promoted by the Pulitzer Prizes.
- I agree that genocide denial by a reporter while the genocide is occurring is contrary to the principles promoted by the Pulitzer Prizes.

Not one member of the Board replied. There are two possibilities:

- The Board is of the opinion that the answer to both questions is *No*. That would mean that the Pulitzer Prizes have no standards whatever, and it's all an essay or jingle contest for the freshest new face on the 'preferred' newspapers.
- The Board realizes that answering *Yes* would end any reason for retaining Walter's Prize. Hence the dead silence – very similar to that of Stalin and his cronies when questioned about their crimes.

Yet, in fact, several members of the Board did reply to my questions.

Mr. William Safire

During the Janet Cooke incident of 1981, Mr. Safire wrote very pompously (May 20, 1981): "newspaper power is not reporter power (or columnist power). ... A newspaper ... cannot allow its power to be abused."

Does this not apply to Duranty so much more than to Janet Cooke? But words are Mr. Safire's stock in trade. He throws them about with wild abandon, for Mr. Agnew, for Mr. Nixon, for Mr. Kirk, or any other client willing to pay.

I have already sent a copy of this column to Mr. Safire, but he has not replied. I suspect Mr. Safire has no recollection of writing this puff piece and resents being reminded of his words a quarter of a century later. After all, this was no declaration of principles; it was filler for a column of text adjacent to some advertising, the real purpose of newspapers. And it was part of the *Times*'s campaign of bashing the Post for its *faux pas*. Hey, Mr. Bill really turned out some good phrases there! No need to get nasty and hold it against him! Mr. Safire, do you stand by what you wrote then or not?

Mr. Louis Boccardi

When Mr. Gissler became the Administrator of the Pulitzer Prizes in 2002, Louis D. Boccardi said, "The board and the university are pleased to welcome a person of Gissler's stature and **standards** to continue the **important mission** of the Pulitzers." Whatever

those standards may be, Mr. Gissler has kept them very close to his vest, except for very questionable statements to the press and others. And what is this important mission? Keeping very, very quiet about Duranty?

Mr. John S. Carroll

When Seymour Topping resigned as Administrator of the Pulitzer Prizes, Mr. Carroll said: “No one has been more ardently devoted to the **integrity** of the institution.” Mr. Topping apparently informed Mr. Gissler of the previous complaints about Duranty. This so-called integrity appears to include stonewalling (another area that Mr. Safire admired about the *Washington Post*’s handling of the Cooke incident). It would be interesting to know when Mr. Topping informed Mr. Gissler of the party-line on Duranty – when my letter first reached Mr. Gissler, or as soon as Mr. Gissler assumed his office of maintaining the integrity of the mission?

In his remarks at the Pulitzer Prize luncheon on May 30, 2002, Mr. Carroll had something more to add on the Pulitzer Prizes themselves.

- “Newspapers that had stayed the course, never wavering in their mission of giving citizens the information they need to govern themselves...”
- “What they all [the ‘winners’] share ... is this: a moral vision. Each of these works is animated by an ardently held view of what constitutes right in this world, and what is wrong.” Mr. Carroll, do you see the irony of these statements when directed at Walter Duranty? But there is more.
- “In my opinion, the board’s judgment in the journalism categories tends to be very good, though of course not infallible.” Then why the tenacious refusal to admit a great wrong in the past?
- “The Pulitzer Prizes reward past work, but their hope is to foster even better work in the future...” Mr. Carroll, does graduating from shilling for Stalin to genocide denial fit into your vision for the Prizes?

Prof. David Kennedy

I assume that your Prize-winning book *Freedom from Fear* in 2000 did not deal with fear of Stalin. Is one to assume that when it comes to knowledge of Stalin and his crimes, you are as ignorant as a doornail? Can the same be said about the rest of the Board, which would explain the total lack of any outrage at the scam Duranty pulled on the American public?

The Rest of the Board

You can all let out that deep breath you have been holding. I didn’t have the time nor think it worthwhile to read any of your deadly prose – here today, gone tomorrow, like so many wisps of smoke. Lacking conviction, meaning and long-term belief.

Janet Cooke

Every ‘eminent institution’ requires one soul-searching crisis. In the recent literature on the Pulitzer Prizes, this has been the Janet Cooke incident. Let us examine this “scandal.”

Cooke fooled the *Washington Post* into hiring her with a falsified resume, including false claims of speaking four languages. The hiring manager, Ben Bradlee never even said a sentence in French to her before hiring her.

She then fabricated a story of an 8-year old heroin addict, which won her the Pulitzer Prize. Three days later, she admitted the story was a fabrication, resigned and disappeared from reporting, fortunate not to have been arrested for criminal mischief. What harm had she done? The Washington, DC, public schools wasted effort looking for an 8-year old with needle tracks on his arms. The Mayor and Police Department were distracted from their routine business.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I posit that with the Cooke incident the American press corps wet its collective shorts over nothing. If one is looking for “the scandal” of the Pulitzer Prizes, I offer Walter Duranty, “the greatest liar I ever met,” as his contemporary Malcolm Muggeridge called him.

And it gets better. The Washington Post returned the Prize to the Pulitzer Board. Now suppose that Janet Cooke had worked at *The New York Times*. This newspaper has a keen interest in its Pulitzer scorecard and wouldn't let one of its Pulitzer marbles go, no matter what! *The New York Times* maintains close relations with Columbia University, hiring many graduates of the School of Journalism and making large donations – not to buy influence of course. Like hell. Had Cooke been working at the Newspaper of Record in 1981, she would probably still have her job and her Prize and would be considered an expert on child addicts, provided she had kept her mouth shut and gone to Berlitz to learn those languages she supposedly knew. Would the Board have demanded the return of the Prize if the *The New York Times* had refused to give it up? What if the *Post* had refused to give up the Prize? We'll never know, but one may have unkind suspicions.

Ethical and Professional Standards

This leads us back to the ethical and professional standards that the Pulitzer Prizes purport to promote.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the time for juvenile evasion and stonewalling is past. If any of you are incompetent or unwilling to discuss these issues like adults, I suggest you resign and make way for more mature minds. The Pulitzer Prizes have long ago ceased to be a private plaything. They have arrogated for themselves the status of the most prestigious award for journalists in the United States, the Academy Awards for Journalism. You owe the public an explanation for this scandalous episode.

Those of you who are left, kindly reply to the following questions:

- Do the Pulitzer Prizes have any standards in the area of ethics and professionalism?
- Is falsifying information by omission or addition of fabrications an acceptable practice for journalists?
- Is genocide denial acceptable practice for journalists?
- Perhaps it has to do with who the perpetrators are, and whether the victims are on the approved list of victims?

- If the charges against Duranty, much more serious than those against Cooke, are true, is that reason to revoke his Prize?
- As I asked Mr. Gissler, what would it take to have Walter Duranty's Prize revoked?

I, my numerous associates, and the public await your answers.

Sincerely,

Markian Pelech, Ph.D.

40 Manor Drive
Hillsborough, NJ 08844
April 28, 2003

To the Board of the Pulitzer Prizes

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I apologize for not writing to you more frequently, but I have interests and obligations other than Walter and the Board of the Pulitzer Prizes, as I am sure you can understand.

Thank you for your responses to my survey. I will soon be summarizing them for an article. You will have the opportunity to review it prior to publication to ensure its accuracy.

As you can see from the attached, I have suggested a change in my dealings with the Board. Should the remainder of the Board wish to deal with the Duranty issue like mature adults, I will be pleased to correspond with you through the chair of the Board, Ms. Rowe.

Evidently, you may continue to follow the juvenile stonewalling tactics of the Administrators of the Prizes. I am sure that the current party line was formulated before Mr. Gissler's tenure, perhaps by Seymour Topping, himself a former editor of the New York Times. This will lead you down the path of becoming yet another Board that "did not see fit" to do anything about the rogue in the gallery of excellence.

Or you may act on your principles and standards of ethics and professionalism and end your careers with honor and dignity. Some of you are on the verge of retirement.

I dare say that most of you have little conception of the Soviet Union under Josef Vissarionovich Djugashvili. You may therefore think that shilling for him was not much different than shilling, for example, for the likes of Vice-President Agnew and crafting cute alliterative phrases like "nattering nabobs of negativism." Djugashvili was made of much harder stuff. He came up with pithy statements such as, "A single death is a tragedy, a million deaths are a statistic." Are you sure you want to cover for someone who concealed such multitudes of crimes from the West?

I would suggest that the first step in the right direction would be for me to present you a written critique of Walter Duranty's Pulitzer-winning articles and his articles concerning the Famine.

Respectfully,

Markian Pelech, Ph.D.

40 Manor Drive
Hillsborough, NJ 08844
April 28, 2003

To the Board of the Pulitzer Prizes

Re: Conflict of Interest and Recusal

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Board:

Conflict of Interest

It is a well-documented fact that the *New York Times* has a very special relationship with Columbia University, the Graduate School of Journalism, and the Pulitzer Prizes. I refer you to J. Douglas Bates, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, New York, 1990, Chapter 11, "Columbia, the *Prizes*, and the *Times*." The author demonstrates the flow of large donations from the Sulzberger family to the University, the hiring of large numbers of Journalism School graduates by the *Times*, and the reception of an inordinate number of Prizes by the *Times* and its staff.

Recusal

As honorable men, the gentlemen from Columbia University (Mr. Sig Gissler, Professor Lee C. Bollinger, and Prof. David A. Klatell) and the *New York Times* (Mr. William Safire) should have no objections to recusing themselves from any further involvement in the discussion of a Prize awarded to a reporter of the *New York Times*.

Sincerely,

Markian Pelech, Ph.D.