

# **Holodomor**

## **Famine - Genocide in Ukraine 1932-1933**



Monument to Holodomor victims in Kyiv, Ukraine

### **Addendum to the Holodomor Power Point Presentation**

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## Ukraine – Background information

- Ukraine is the largest country in Europe by territory. It is larger than the following countries combined: England, Ireland, Lithuania, Hungary, Austria, Denmark, Switzerland, Belgium, Israel, Liechtenstein, and Monaco. The Russian Republic and Turkey are larger in territory, but they are in Europe and Asia.
- It is located in Eastern Europe and is home to 46 million people.
- Ukrainians belong to the Eastern Slavic family and possess a centuries-old culture dating back several millennia and known as the Trypillian culture.
- Known as the “Breadbasket of Europe” because of its fertile soil, Ukraine is also rich in such natural resources as coal, manganese, and iron ore. Ukraine produces enough grain not only to for its own consumption, but it also ranks as a leading grain exporting country. Ukraine and North Caucasus produced more than half the grain of the entire USSR.



- Despite a long domination by Tsarist Russia, Ukraine retained its identity and proclaimed independence in 1918. In 1922, central and eastern parts of Ukraine were forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union.
- The rural population of Ukraine was predominantly Ukrainian and possessed a strong sense of individuality and ownership. Russians, on the other hand, were used to the absolute rule by the czars and communal institutions, like the Russian *mir*
- The urban population was largely ethnically Russian. In 1922, for example, Russians made up 53% of the Communist Party of Ukraine, but comprised less than 10% of the population.
- The New Economic Policy (1921 – 1928) - To appease the population and to gain control, Moscow adopted the New Economic Policy, granting Ukraine some economic autonomy.
- In 1923, a series of policies known as indigenization were adopted in non-Russian areas, supporting the cultural life of the non-Russian people. In Ukraine it was known as

Ukrainization and resulted in impressive cultural growth in literature, scholarship, and the arts.

- After a brief period of religious, economic and cultural revival, the Soviet regime began repressions against the Ukrainian nation that lasted into the 1930's.

## **Stalin's Reasons for Implementing the Holodomor**

Various authors narrow the motivations of the Stalinist leadership in engineering the Famine to the following 3 objectives:

1. To annihilate a significant part of the Ukrainian population, openly resisting Soviet repressive policies in Ukraine
2. To terrorize the surviving Ukrainian population into submission to the Soviet totalitarian regime
3. To provide funds for Soviet industrial expansion and the purchase of machinery in the West from the sale of expropriated Ukrainian grain and other agricultural products.

In his letter to Kaganovich, one of Stalin's henchmen responsible for the Holodomor, Stalin wrote: "If we do not begin correcting the situation in Ukraine immediately, we could lose Ukraine... To make it our task to transform Ukraine in the shortest possible term into a veritable fortress of the USSR; into a veritable exemplary republic. Spare no money for that."

## **Stalin's policies leading to the Holodomor**

**Stalin's Five Year Plans** –in order to industrialize the USSR in a short period of time, Stalin put forth a series of Five Year Plans.

**The first Five-Year Plan** (1928-1933) abolished private industry, nationalized all commerce, collectivized farmers and imposed quotas for grain and other foodstuffs. Its basic components included collectivization, dekulakization, and grain procurement.

### **Collectivization**

- Instituted on November 17, 1929, it was a policy whereby collective farming replaced individual farming. Farmers had to surrender their land, livestock, and farming implements to collective farms.
- In Stalin's words, the goal was "to establish a system whereby the collective farmers would deliver, under penalty, to the state and the cooperative organizations, the entirety of their marketable grain."
- The resistance to collectivization and grain-procurement policies was especially strong in Ukraine and the Kuban in North Caucasus. In many regions of Ukraine, people rebelled against forced collectivization and the Soviet rule, but were brutally suppressed by the army and the secret police.

- By mid 1932, seven-tenths of Ukraine’s farms had been collectivized, so collectivization was not the primary reason for the Holodomor. Collectivization did not increase grain production, but it destroyed independent farmers, gave the state a much greater control over the agricultural production and made it easier for the state to take a greater proportion of the harvest.

**Dekulakization**

- An essential component of forced collectivization was Stalin’s policy of “liquidation of the **kulaks** as a class,” proclaimed by Stalin on December 27, 1929. The government could take away their property, jail them, deport them to Siberia, or execute them.
- The label *kulak* was applied indiscriminately and included not only well-to-do farmers, but also village leaders and, in fact, all those who did **not** support the Soviet government policies, regardless of their economic status.
- More than 1 million Ukrainian farmers were dispossessed in the early 1930’s and about 850,000 of those were deported by freight trains to Siberia, where most of them perished. Many never reached their destination.
- Through collectivization and deportations Stalin achieved several objectives:
  1. Individual farmers and, by extension, the villages were brought under government control.
  2. Those who were deported provided free labor for Russian forest industry.
  3. Deportation outside Ukraine removed the more nationally conscious segment of the population.

**Grain procurement**

- Involved the confiscation of all grain until the grain collection quota was met.
- The grain quotas for Ukraine were increased every year:
 

1928	17.6%
1929	27.3%
1930	in excess of 30%
1931	in excess of 40%
1932	the food collection quota exceeded the actual harvest

Grain quotas were reduced only during the harvest of 1933 after the Famine had broken the Ukrainian peasantry.

**Nature of the Holodomor**

**The Holodomor** began in Ukraine in the fall of 1932 and reached its peak in the spring of 1933. People were starving amid one of the most fertile farming regions of the world. The highest death rates were in the rural grain growing regions and not in the cities, as one would expect. Cities and industrial regions were provided with a rationing system. At the same time, stockpiles of grain rotted and the Soviet government exported grain to the West.

**Grain quotas** - excessive grain quotas were imposed on collective farms, which were impossible for the farmers to meet. The Soviet government intensified grain quotas during the Holodomor and grain continued to be shipped from Ukraine to Western Europe.

**Watchtowers** - In the summer of 1932, watchtowers were erected in rural areas of Ukraine and armed guards were posted to watch over the harvest.

**The “Five ears of corn law”** of August 7, 1932 imposed severe penalty or even death for the “theft of socialist property,” which included all property in the collective farms. Ukrainian villagers faced death for picking a few ears of grain from the fields, which had belonged to them until recently. In the beginning of 1933 some 54,645 farmers were tried and condemned, and 2,000 of those were executed.

**Blacklisting** - Villages which failed to deliver the quotas required by the government, were put on a blacklist. They were barred from buying goods of general consumption such as salt, soap, matches and other household items.

**Internal passports** were issued to city dwellers but not to villagers. Villagers could not travel to the cities without passports and were thus legally attached to the land, like serfs. To buy train tickets villagers needed written permission from authorities.

**Closing the borders of Ukraine and Kuban** - On January 22, 1933, a decree, issued by Stalin, closed the borders of Ukraine & Kuban. Police patrols were stationed at the borders, preventing villagers from crossing them. Those who attempted to enter Russia, where food was available, were sent back to their villages. Food was confiscated if someone tried to bring it to Ukraine. Ukraine was the only Soviet republic whose borders were sealed to prevent people from fleeing, or food aid from entering.

**Activist brigades** - Since the farmers could not meet the quotas, Moscow sent special brigades to ensure compliance. 25,000 Communist activists, mostly non-Ukrainian city dwellers recruited in urban areas and in Russia were sent to the villages of Ukraine. They went from house to house and confiscated all the food they could find. They even dismantled houses of farmers to make sure they were not concealing any food.

### **Grain exported and refused aid**

**Russification and repressions** - the Holodomor was accompanied by widespread repressions and Russification. The Soviet Union considered Ukraine to be an essential part of the Russian Empire and was determined to keep it under Russian domination at all costs. It continued the czarist imperial policies against Ukraine and embarked on complete Russification.

- **The destruction of the Ukrainian elite**

In 1928, the Soviet regime began repressions against the Ukrainian intellectuals and the church. Hundreds of writers, poets, scholars were executed or sent to Siberia. Ukraine’s elite was virtually wiped out. Out of 240 Ukrainian authors 200 perished, and out of 84 linguists 62 were liquidated. The Ukrainian alphabet, vocabulary and grammar were revised to make them more like Russian. Teaching Russian became compulsory in all Ukrainian schools and the Russian language was declared the main medium of communication.

- **The destruction of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church**

The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (independent of Moscow) was formally dissolved in January 1930 and all its parishes were closed. Out of 34 bishops only two remained alive at the start of World War II. The vast majority of priests and lay activists were executed or exiled to Siberia and the church ceased to exist. Only the Russian Orthodox Church continued to function.

- **The destruction of the kobzars**– these were Ukrainian minstrels, usually blind men, who wandered from place to place and sang Ukrainian folk songs and historical ballads while playing the national Ukrainian instrument, the kobza or bandura. In the mid thirties the First All-Ukrainian Congress of Bandurists was announced and all the folk singers were asked to attend. Several hundred of them gathered and almost all were killed.

## How many people died?

The exact number of victims is not known. Doctors were not allowed to put starvation as the cause of death, and any mention of the Holodomor was a crime against the state.

- Based on newly discovered documents, censuses, and eyewitness accounts, most scholars place the number of victims at 7-10 million people. One third of those who died were children.
- The census of 1937 revealed a sharp decline in the Ukrainian population. The census was declared “subversive”, the results were impounded, and the top census officials shot.
- Otto Schiller, the agricultural specialist attached to the German embassy in Moscow, who had just completed a trip through the major farming regions of the USSR, stated: “I do not believe that the figure of ten million, which has been mentioned elsewhere, is an exaggeration.”
- During its peak in the spring of 1933, 25,000 people died daily of starvation.
- In his book, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, the British historian Robert Conquest states: “A quarter of the rural population, men, women, and children, lay dead or dying, the rest in various stages of debilitation with no strength to bury their families or neighbors.”

## Consequences of the Holodomor

The consequences of the Holodomor extended far beyond the human losses and had devastating and far-reaching effects: economic, social, demographic, political, psychological, cultural and linguistic.

- Millions were deliberately starved to death by the Soviet regime. The decimation of the rural population brought about the destruction of the Ukrainian language, traditions, and the spirit of individualism and independence.
- The Ukrainian elite and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church were annihilated through massive arrests, deportation, and firing squads. Russification encompassed all spheres of Ukrainian life.
- It created a number of social problems, including vast numbers of orphaned children, many of them resorting to crime as a means of survival.

- The Holodomor brought about a significant alteration in Ukraine's demographics. Entire villages were depopulated. After the famine, 2-3 million people were brought from Russia into the depopulated areas of Ukraine.
- The Holodomor had a devastating impact on the psychology of Ukrainians who survived the Famine. Starved into submission and filled with constant fear of repressions, they were compelled to pretend that it had never happened and sing praises to the regime.

## **Communism = Nazism**

- Both were totalitarian regimes, which not only denied human rights but were also responsible for the loss of millions of lives
- **In 1939, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany signed an agreement, known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, invaded Poland, thus starting World War II.**
- In his book "Le Livre Noir du Communisme" (The Black Book of Communism") the French historian Stephane Courtois writes that "Communism and Nazism are, and always were, morally indistinguishable."

### **However, there are also differences between the two:**

- The Soviet Union was the longest lasting empire of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It also covered a larger land area than Nazism, and therefore affected more people.
- The Nazi leaders were punished for the crimes they committed against humanity. Yet, no Communist leader has ever been brought to justice.
- The Holodomor was a precursor to the Holocaust and Communist famine genocides perpetrated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Why is the Ukrainian genocide virtually unknown in the West?**

There are several reasons why there was a lack of response to the Holodomor in the West and why it is still largely unknown:

- There was a complete cover-up of the Holodomor in the Soviet Union until its break-up in 1991. No mention of it was allowed.
- Soviet propaganda was very successful in convincing the West that the Soviet Union was in the process of building a more prosperous society and that all reports of starvation were false.
- Foreign correspondents stationed in Moscow were banned from traveling to Ukraine and the North Caucasus. Some journalists, such as Malcolm Muggeridge and Gareth Jones visited Ukraine illegally at the height of the famine and published reports about it.
- Most Western correspondents feared losing their journalistic privileges and followed the Communist Party line. Walter Duranty of *The New York Times*, currying favor with Stalin, reported that "there is no famine." He was awarded a Pulitzer prize in journalism, which has not been revoked to this day
- "Potemkin villages"- showcase villages designed by the Soviet government, where they brought Western visitors to show them that life in the collective farms was flourishing and blissful. Edouard Herriot, premier of France visited Ukraine in September 1933 and the Soviet authorities arranged a tour for him. Upon returning to France, he denied any reports of starvation in Ukraine.

- Europe and the U.S. were in the midst of Depression and fascism was on the rise in Germany.
- In summary, the West largely ignored what was happening in Ukraine. The United States recognized the Soviet Union in 1933, and in 1934 it became a member of the League of Nations.

## **Holodomor – Genocidal Starvation of Ukrainians**

Holodomor, which literally means killing by starvation, was one of the most horrendous genocides of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the result of deliberate starvation created by the Soviet government, a deliberate act of killing 7-10 million Ukrainians. It was not a result of any natural calamity or a war. Witness accounts, the laws passed by the Soviet government, and the policies it implemented at the time show that the Holodomor was intentional, planned and executed by Stalin and his regime.

Geographically, it targeted Ukraine and the Kuban region in the northern Caucasus, whose population was largely ethnically Ukrainian. It targeted villages, including those which were already collectivized, inhabited mostly by ethnic Ukrainians who kept the language, traditions and the spirit of independence. The boundaries of the Holodomor strongly coincide with the borders of Ukraine and areas beyond her borders where Ukrainians settled.

Collectivization took place throughout the Soviet Union, but only in Ukraine did it assume a genocidal character. Stalin used the Famine, accompanied by the destruction of Ukrainian cultural and political elite, as part of his strategy to destroy Ukraine as a nation.

The U.S. Congress Commission reached the following conclusions on the Ukraine Famine (in 1988):

1. “The Ukrainian Famine of 1932-1933 was caused by the maximum extraction of agricultural produce from the rural population.”
2. “Stalin knew that people were starving to death in Ukraine by late 1932.”
3. “Attempts were made to prevent the starving from traveling to areas where food was available.”
4. “While the famine also took place during the 1932-1933 agricultural year in the Volga basin and North Caucasus Territory as a whole, the invasiveness of Stalin’s interventions of both the fall of 1932 and January 1933 are paralleled only in the ethnically Ukrainian Kuban region of the North Caucasus.”
5. “Official Soviet allegations of ‘kulak sabotage’ upon which all ‘difficulties were blamed during the Famine are false.”
6. “The Famine was not, as is often alleged, related to drought.”



7. "The victims of the Ukrainian Famine numbered in millions."
8. "Joseph Stalin and those around him committed genocide against Ukrainians in 1932-1933."



"Of the historic responsibility of the Soviet government for the Famine of 1932-1933 there can be no reasonable doubt...it stifled any appeal for foreign aid by denying the very fact of the Famine and by refusing to foreign journalists the right to travel in the Famine regions until it was all over. Famine was quite deliberately employed as an instrument of national policy, as the last means of breaking the resistance of the peasantry to the new system where they are divorced from personal ownership of the land and obliged to work under conditions which the state may dictate to them and deliver whatever that state may demand of them.

William H. Chamberlain *Russia's Iron Age*

"The current disaster will bring about a preponderantly Russian colonization of Ukraine. It will transform its ethnographic character. In a future time, perhaps very soon, one will no longer be able to speak of a Ukraine, or a Ukrainian people, and thus not even of a Ukrainian problem, because Ukraine will become, a *de facto* Russian region".

Italian Consul Gradenigo's Dispatch of May 31, 1933

In his essay "Soviet Genocide in the Ukraine," Rafael Lemkin, who coined the word "genocide," describes the genocidal destruction of Ukraine and calls it "the classic example of Soviet genocide, its longest and broadest experiment in Russification – the destruction of the Ukrainian nation."

"Moscow employed the famine as a political weapon against the Ukrainians in the year 1932-1933. The famine was in its *entirely* artificially induced and organized." F.M. Pigido (an economist who lived and worked in Ukraine during the Famine of 1932 1933) *Investigation of Communist Takeover & Occupation of the Non-Russian Nations of the USSR* p.35

- Russia still has not acknowledged the genocidal nature of the Holodomor and Putin considers the fall of the Soviet Union as the greatest catastrophe of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, the current Russian regime is trying to rehabilitate Stalin.

## Vocabulary/Terms

**collective farm** – in theory a cooperative venture; in practice, it was the state that received and disbursed goods and resources and supervised the members

**collectivization** – government policy that replaced individually held land with huge government controlled farms

**communism** – economic system in which all land, natural resources, and industries are owned or controlled by the government (In theory, they are supposed to be under communal ownership and shared equally, but no communist government has ever implemented this idea.

**genocide** – the systematic destruction of an entire racial, ethnic, or religious group. The word "genocide" was first coined in 1943 by Rafael Lemkin, using the Latin roots geno and -cide as in "homicide"

**Holodomor** – literally, murder by starvation, a Ukrainian term for the Artificial Famine of 1932-1933, in which at least 7 million Ukrainians were deliberately starved to death as a result of Stalin's policies.

**NKVD/KGB** – an agency of the Soviet government with a wide network of official and secret police in charge of combating activity deemed as dangerous to Soviet rule. The NKVD was in charge of Soviet prisons and the concentration camp system (GULAG). Later the NKVD was transformed into the KGB.

**propaganda** – a systematic effort to persuade people to accept ideas and to mold people's views into a particular mindset using such means as education, mass media, public meetings, publications

**totalitarianism** – political system in which one political party or group maintains control over all spheres of life. Totalitarian governments are extreme dictatorships that combat all opposing groups and ideas. Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and all communist countries were examples of totalitarian governments.

**USSR** – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Formed by Russian Communists in the early 1920's. It was comprised of 15 republics. The Soviet Union was officially dissolved in December 1991.

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