

Revelations from the Russian Archives

UKRAINIAN FAMINE

The dreadful famine that engulfed Ukraine, the northern Caucasus, and the lower Volga River area in 1932-1933 was the result of Joseph Stalin's policy of forced collectivization. The heaviest losses occurred in Ukraine, which had been the most productive agricultural area of the Soviet Union. Stalin was determined to crush all vestiges of Ukrainian nationalism. Thus, the famine was accompanied by a devastating purge of the Ukrainian intelligentsia and the Ukrainian Communist party itself. The famine broke the peasants' will to resist collectivization and left Ukraine politically, socially, and psychologically traumatized.

The policy of all-out collectivization instituted by Stalin in 1929 to finance industrialization had a disastrous effect on agricultural productivity. Nevertheless, in 1932 Stalin raised Ukraine's grain procurement quotas by forty-four percent. This meant that there would not be enough grain to feed the peasants, since Soviet law required that no grain from a collective farm could be given to the members of the farm until the government's quota was met. Stalin's decision and the methods used to implement it condemned millions of peasants to death by starvation. Party officials, with the aid of regular troops and secret police units, waged a merciless war of attrition against peasants who refused to give up their grain. Even indispensable seed grain was forcibly confiscated from peasant households. Any man, woman, or child caught taking even a handful of grain from a collective farm could be, and often was, executed or deported. Those who did not appear to be starving were often suspected of hoarding grain. Peasants were prevented from leaving their villages by the NKVD and a system of internal passports.

The death toll from the 1932-33 famine in Ukraine has been estimated between six million and seven million. According to a Soviet author, "Before they died, people often lost their senses and ceased to be human beings." Yet one of Stalin's lieutenants in Ukraine stated in 1933 that the famine was a great success. It showed the peasants "who is the master here. It cost millions of lives, but the collective farm system is here to stay."..

[Memorandum on Grain Problem](#)

[Translation of memorandum](#)

Go to the [Next Section of the Soviet Archives exhibit](#)

Return to the [Table of contents for the Soviet Archives exhibit](#)

Go to the [Library of Congress Home Page](#)



Library of Congress

[Contact Us](#) (July 22, 2010)

[Legal](#) | [External Link Disclaimer](#)