

Extended Essay in History

The factors that lead to the Ukrainian Famine “Holodomor”

Research question:

How far was the Ukrainian Famine a result of the First Five Year Plan?

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Introduction

The Ukrainian Famine from 1932 to 1933, also known as the Holodomor, was one of the most devastating events that took place during the first half of the 20th century Ukraine. The estimation of direct losses during 1932-1934 in Ukraine is 3.9 million. According to modern historians, the famine has two stages: the built-up of starvation in 1932 and the peak of the Holodomor in 1933 when 90 percent of the death occurred. Moreover, the total number of excess deaths in rural areas is 12.7 times the number in urban areas, which implies catastrophic death as the direct consequence of starvation. (Rudnytskyi²) (Rudnytskyi⁶⁴)

There are debates in the historiography regarding the Holodomor as the resources became transparent. The nature of famine itself has arguments over the “man-made famine on purpose”, meaning the elimination of Ukraine Nationalism and a punishment for the race; or “man-made famine by accident”, which refers to the error within the policies that lead to political and social failures. (Wheatcroft 469) (Waal 131)

This essay pinpoints the major causes of the Holodomor (1932-1933), which mainly consist events from the late 1920s to the early 1930s, including the USSR policies and the Soviet leadership. The essay draws on numbers of prominent secondary sources written by different Sovietologists that are vested with authorities or sources like primary encounters, so the perspective can be shown through the investigation. It is worthy of investigation because as an example of a social engineering type of catastrophe (Rudnytskyi⁵⁴), Holodomor was caused by multiple man-made factors that remain debatable, several major factors can be incorporated into Stalin’s ambitious Five Year Plan in the 1920s, so it leads to the question that will be discussed in this essay: How far was the Ukrainian Famine a result of the First Five Year Plan?

1.The First Five Year plan:

1.1 Overview:

The Five-Year plan, a comprehensive planning method forced upon Ukraine from 1928, was implemented by the Soviet Union leader Joseph Stalin. It was regarded as the first experience of in state repression under Stalin. Followed the end of the New Economic policy, it brought a variety of projects to stimulate the Soviet Union's recovery. As major policies that took place in the pre-WW2 era, the plan was significant as a symbol for Stalinism in the USSR. Also, noting that a variety of new projects were injected in the 1930s because of the plan before the outbreak of famine, the First Five Year Plan itself became a determinate factor for Holodomor.

Industrialization, Dekulakization, and collectivization were the main focuses within the First Five Year Plan. The policies played a damaging role in the Holodomor by paving the way for starvation.

1.2 Industrialization:

Industrialization led to the famine because it shifted the government's focus away from the agriculture and depleted a huge amount of resources, both natural and labor, that overwhelmed the Ukrainian agriculture.

The forced industrialized process was Stalin's way out of the economic backwardness (Naimark56), intended to rapidly industrialize the country by pursuing improbably high growth rates (Naimark 44). Famous historian Robert Conquest called the Industrialization "a crash of program rather than the carefully planned growth" (Conquest168). He provided the

standpoint that the goal of doubling the growth rate (Conquest 111) in industrialization was an over ambitious plan that was difficult for the Ukrainians to fulfill.

The industrialization deepened the pressure and damaged the Collectivization, which leads to failure of harvest and eventually hunger. In order to ensure industrial development, Stalin even argued that the exploitation of the peasant was the key. (Applebum 89) As Stalin's priority and necessity, Industry's "over-fulfillment" was the target for the Soviet Union, and it was indeed developing rapidly. In a specific case, the town of Zaporozh'e became a multiethnic city with a large population, the development was fueled by industrialization, and there were constructions of a massive hydroelectric dam that symbolized its development. (Viola 116) It was only one of the many places that industrialized after the establishment of the Five-Year Plan, which shows the large amount of constructions brought by the program. The success of the industry and the emergence of an industrial center indicated its exorbitant demand for food and human resource, which was produced by the collective farm in rural Ukraine. As for the demand for labor, it caused the urbanization, which the urban population raised 26% from 26 million to 33.2 million within one year in 1931. Between 1929 and 1932, 12.5 million new hands entered the industry and 8.5 million of them were from rural areas. (Conquest 168) The urbanization process showed the vast development in cities, but it also weakened the amount of labor in the agricultural sections. As the number of peasants decreased, their ability to produce grains and resources decreased accordingly. Moreover, although the food production decreased, the demand for food increased because more population concentrated in urban areas and need to be feed. As a result, it is more difficult for the peasants to meet the quota in order to feed workers, and they were forced to sell food for a lower price to reduce the cost of production in the cities, in contrast, they had to pay a higher price for the industrial products for their own production. The costs for peasants is huge, which increased their

pressure and their effectiveness to produce food. Soviet economists defined this process as “the force of saving” for peasants because this economic process made their life more costly and hard to sustain themselves. Moreover, because the focus of the government was industrial growth, they would squeeze the peasants with excessive policies as possible to maintain the cities. Life became more difficult for the peasants when they have to survive under harsh conditions and meet the quota set by the government for the industrial center at the same time. The food shortage was a sign of starvation that could be developed into a famine. Worse, the soviet government and the local leaders continued to seize the grain productions when there was sign of famine appeared in the area. Export increased as a result of the industrialization process that damaged agriculture. The USSR exported low price grains to European countries in order to obtain foreign currency to import industrial machinery for their own industrialization, also they began asking for political favors as well. (Applebaum147) The average grain exports over the Five-Year Plan were 2.7 million tons per year (Conquest171), which is a large number that was hard for the peasants to fulfill when they had domestic pressure and their own survival to worry about.

As a result, Stalin and the Soviet government’s emphasis on Industrialization program led to the failure of agriculture as they caused food problems across the nation with the demand of large amount of food that gave collective farm extra pressure to meet goals.

1.2 Dekulakization:

The Dekulakization, liquidation of the kulaks as a class, was an ideological policy for Stalin involved in the implementation of the collective farms. Originally, most Kulaks were rich farmers who had own agricultural lands during the New Economic policies or the “Decree on land” in 1917. They became a concern for Stalin and his regime when they were recognized as a reified class category (Fitzpatrick357) and threat to Stalin by having an independent ability to live. The Dekulakization policies had a huge impact on agriculture and demographics in Ukraine. The consequence was devastating as the land was reformed and they lost enormous amount of labor force for production. Of all the grain-growing reigns of the USSR, Ukraine delivered the most kulaks: there were 30,000—35,000 kulak families exiled and 50,000 removed. (Applebaum 117) The large demonstrated the social change and population lost in those regions. In 1928-29 at the beginning of dekulakization, the kulaks lost 30%-40% of their means of production. (Conquest101) This thus indicates the production of food decreased because of the policy, which undermined the efficiency of the farm. They minimize the number of kulaks also shows the declining number of laborers in agriculture. The total death recorded by historians as a result of Dekulakization was 6.5 million (Conquest 320), which was devastated to the Ukrainian demographic.

Furthermore, it also damaged the morale of the Ukrainians. The program not only decreases the number of labor but also attacked the religious groups such as churches and individual priests. It weakens the religious impact on the peasants but also discouraged their working morale as the government restricted their beliefs. Moreover, the mass murder of peasants also further stimulated the “anti-soviet mood” because of the horror caused by the Dekulakization. This aggravated the emotion of oppositions and lead to more conflicts between the government and Ukrainian.

As the demand for food increased due to industrialization and urbanization, the labor forces in the countryside were weakened by the Dekulakization, so the production of food became more difficult. When people were unable to meet the quota, they cannot feed themselves and starve. So the Industrialization and Dekulakization set the premise of famine that will be worsened by collectivization in the First Five Year Plan.

1.3 Collectivization:

According to historian Wasyl Hryshko's *Moscow Does not Believe in Tears* in 1963, he regarded the collectivization as the follow-up step of dekulakization. (*Commission on the Ukraine Famine*²⁴) Collectivization, approved in 1928 by the Soviet government, was one of the signature policies during Stalin's regime. Collectivization has been regarded as "The Great Upheaval" or "the Great Turnaround". It was an essential step in Stalin's ideology for nation-building and was the foundation for Industrialization. (Applebaum⁸⁸) Historian Alec Nove, an economic historian of the Soviet Union, provided a standpoint that Stalin considered himself having a war with the peasants. He once revealed the attitude towards collectivization, which he was willing to sacrifice and exploit the peasants' fortune to achieve the ideal form of the Soviet Union. (*Commission on the Ukraine Famine*²⁷) This thus indicates the recklessness the Soviet government would enforce upon the peasants in order to obtain food.

Historian Naym Jasny's classical study in 1949 blamed the collectivization for the general breakdown of Ukrainian agriculture. (*Commission on the Ukraine Famine*⁹) Also, Victor Kravchenko, a "high ranking defector in the USSR" that experienced the famine presented

and strengthen the Sovietological view that the excesses of collectivization were a major factor of the catastrophe. (*Commission on the Ukraine Famine*⁷) The primary source revealed the firsthand encounter of Kravchenko, showing the direct impact on the people. With the consensus from different historians under a different context, the impact of collectivization was undeniable severe to the Ukrainians' hunger.

Incorporated with industrialization and dekulakization, collectivization further fueled starvation and created the context for the Soviet government to react with extreme policies. Although it is not the direct cause for the famine, it was the most damaging factor that leads to the irreversible devastating reality of famine. The amount of rebellion and repression among the peasants when the collective farm first emerged largely undermined Ukraine's agriculture, and ineffective collective farms under the Soviet government further worsen the situation.

One of the noticeable failures of Collectivization that lead to starvation is the implementation in its early stage in 1929-1930. The amount of chaos caused the casualties, which indicates a less effective labor force for agriculture, and also the imparity peasants sabotage their properties, so it became difficult for the collective farm to produce enough food. As the Collectivization imposed the strict rules by force and deprived the rights of the people that they once owned, revolts began as a response to the strict force. Before the implementation of the Five-Year Plan, the presence of Soviet State control to the Ukrainians has been minimal, for most of the cases (Applebaum¹⁰⁷) The Soviet government begun the chaos by sending instructors that were unable to incorporate with the Ukrainians. The policies were carried out by the 'twenty-five thousanders' (Applebaum¹⁰⁷), who were the urban working class that devoted to the course of the Soviet Union and Stalin's ideology. The role of instructors

intensified the creation of the collective farm as they had embedded ideology that was biased against the peasants, many of them believe peasantry should be responsible for the urban food shortages because of their inefficiency. So, the instructors treated the peasants in the collective farm as different classes and their hospitality indicates their unsympathetic and violent behaviors towards the Ukrainians. The force and violence used during the collectivization agitated chaos across the nation: Almost half of all peasant uprisings against collectivization in 1930 took place in Ukraine. (Naimark 57) This vague description provides an overview of the extent of dissatisfaction among the people and the wide-scale protest demonstrated their anger. Another approach for Ukrainian peasants was to slaughter cows, pigs, sheep, and horses so the collective farm cannot get any advantages. Agitations and rebellious emotion arose within the peasants that even some claimed, “it is better to relieve the animal onto the street” (Applebaum129), which shows the resentment and rebellious of the peasants facing the forced collective farm. However, rebellions caused a more severe impact on agriculture when they left themselves with nothing to work with and became poorer to survive. During this wave of rebellion, the numbers of cattle and horses in the USSR dropped by nearly half. (Applebaum129) The loss of this essential livestock and meat worsens the agriculture status. The decline of horses as a significant tool on farms made the production more ineffective, and the huge losses of pigs and goats limited their food source. The reduction of grain production hindered their ability to reach the high quota set by the Soviet Union, and as a result, people started to fall into starvation. The amount of destruction drawn by the implementation of the collectivization built up the context of the famine in an early sense.

Following the unsettled beginning of the collectivization, the design and management of collective farms lead to its failure and the way to starvation. The collective farm in 1930 was

chaotic, there were peasants joining, quitting, and rejoining the farms. The unstable labor status slowed the speed of production, and mobility reduces the number of peasants working and producing on the farm. The distribution of land and job within the collective farm was also unclear, they didn't have an organized plan of planning together. Alongside the unsettling conflicts between managers and peasants, it was difficult for the collective farm to produce in a sustainable way, thus the total amount of grain production declined. Moreover, the high number of quotas sets by the government worsen the situation for the peasants. The Five-Year Plan required Ukrainian communists to collect 8.3 million tons of grain from the six collection districts (Applebaum 152), which is impossible for the collective farms to achieve under their current condition of lacking labor, equipment, and stability. Stalin's policies regarding quotas made the life of peasants more miserable by banning trade in early 1932 for the farm that couldn't meet the quota. Also, for the unfulfilled sectors, Stalin ordered all the available stocks to be seized, no matter what the consequences for the local population. (Dolot10) This policy further depleted the food for Ukrainians. With the low production and high quota, the Soviet government took all possible food sources away from the collective farm and left them in hunger.

Unsuccessful startup shaped the nature of Collectivization, the brutality, and violence forecast the following years. Running the collective farm itself was even a harder task for the Soviet Union. Dissatisfaction arose because of the nature of Collectivization: the Ukrainian parents didn't have any control over themselves including the right to self-govern or to transport to other places. Most of the peasants who joined the Collective farm were forced by the terror and threats of the OPGU, so they lacked work intentions and their work morale is extremely low. Peasants started to take advantage of the collective system by minimizing the amount of work, stealing the state's property, and mistreated the equipment owned by the state.

Alongside the lack of agricultural animals that had been killed during resistance, the farm failed to produce sufficient outcome. The missed responsibility led them to become a counteract to the Soviet Union.

Historian Vsevolod Holubnychy provided a view that the famine was caused by “external and internal economic factors.”(*Commission on the Ukraine Famine*²⁰), which refers to the situation caused by the Five-Year Plan’s policies. He also described the First Five Year Plan as a significant cause of the Famine by stating its nature as an “improvisation”, suggesting its failure of management and control Ukraine. Also, the planner of the First Five Year Plan was “obstinate and over-enthusiastic”, with too many simultaneous projects and lack of organization, so the nation was not able to meet its need for food and eventually started the mass starvation of Holodomor.

2. Management Policies

Despite the role of the Five-Year Plan that paved the way to the Holodomor, there are alternative factors that were arguably the major contributions to the famine.

2.1 Blockade:

The policy of blockade played an important role in the outbreak of famine, in other words, it made a large number of death inevitable by blocking ways for peasants to leave the region or obtain food. The mass movement of peasants was difficult for the collective farm to produce food. Peasants that left the damaged the Soviet Union's reputation in Europe by exposing the negative political image. Also, the instability of the collective farm peasants caused chaos in the collective farm as the labor forces are instantly changing and the tasks were assigned to moving people. The food production on the farm consequently decreased, and quotas became more unachievable.

Soon, in 1933, Stalin and Molotov closed the borders of Ukraine to prevent the mass departure of collective farm peasants and started a 'food blockade' during the fall and winter of 1932-1933 that prevent any possible way for peasants to search for food. Beyond that, it "effectively ensuring that no information about the famine would trickle out". (Graziosi106) (Shapoval107) The creation of the passport system limited social mobility and strengthen the control over the peasantry. This thus deteriorated the situation as Ukrainians were isolated in harsh conditions without assistance from outside. So the blockade was the key factor that turned starvation to famine as it left the people to starve without government assistance.

However, Historian William Horsley Gantt offered an argument that countered the failure of the blockade from a clinical perspective. He considered himself as a friend of the USSR and

recognized some benefit brought by the policies. He stated that the blockade and the passport system reinforced the nation by preventing the spread of epidemics. He also argued that the Five-Year Plan should be blamed for “lowering the living standards, culminating in the great epidemic and famine of 1932”(Commission on the Ukraine Famine⁴). As a result, this historiography limited the negative impact of the blockade and strengthened the argument that the First Five Year Plan was the main cause of the Holodomor.

3. Leadership:

3.1 Stalin’s role

Also, Stalin was the leader of the Soviet Union that made decisions of the First Five Year Plan, and the following policies were responsible for the famine as well. His decisions had significant impact to the starvation.

Stalin was responsible for the Holodomor as he neglected the signs of famine and delayed any assistance to the Ukrainians. It was obvious for the Soviet Union to perceive the raising sign of hunger in 1932: Through the data analysis by Wheatcroft, the grain production in 1932 was 15 to 17 million tons less than the following years. (468) A journal called <Osteuropa> during the interwar period reported the absence of famine occurred in the early 1930s. (Commission to on the Ukraine famine³), which indicates the early sign of the famine was easy to perceive in the 1930s, even for the journalists. So, the government should be more aware of the situation as the publications started to discover the sign of famine. Furthermore, The OPGU and Ukrainian State government sent detailed reports on the progress of the harvesting stages every five days (Wheatcroft 468), so these evidences suggest Stalin was aware of the large scale of food shortages that took place in Ukraine.

However, Stalin prioritized other aspects instead of Ukrainian's starvation. His political actions imply that he didn't value the loss in Ukraine because the government didn't release strategic grain stock to feed the starving Ukrainian and even continued the high quota for Collectivization. Grain was still being exported to European countries for foreign currency that is essential for industrial machinery purchase (Kuromiya665) and an engineer recalled that "they exported everything in order to get foreign capital for the 'needs of the state'." (Applebaum159) As shown in the Industrialization program in the Five Year Plan, Stalin saw Ukraine as the agricultural area that support the industry and value the industrial areas more than collective farm. According to the calculation, if Moscow stopped their grain exports and released the strategic grain reserves, there would be 2.6 million grains available for the starving population, and the amount of grain could optimally be saved 7.8 million lives. (Kuromiya 665). Worth mention, the food blockade was never introduced in any other Soviet Republic despite Ukraine. (Shapoval107), which implies Stalin's deliberate neglect of crisis in Ukraine. As a result, Stalin's decision making indicates that he prioritized the benefit of exportation more than the Ukrainian lives, and he valued the machinery and industry more than the collective farm. So he sacrificed the benefit of Ukrainians to fulfill his pursue. Thus, Stalin's ideology and the decision making as the Soviet leader contributed to the outbreak of famine.

Conclusion:

The First Five Year Plan took the major responsibility for worsening the situation. It triggered the tipping point of starvation and famine through the three main programs: the focus on Industrialization and overweight the collectivization. Despite that, Collectivization itself was overall a failure that was chaotic with mismanagement and never effectively utilizes the peasant's strength. Also, dekulakization caused an intense atmosphere and undermined the labor force of the collective farm.

It was noticeable that even when the famine had entered the Second ,the outbreak of famine from cumulative starvation, the effect of the First Five Year was still apparent. The plans emphasize Industrialization led to Stalin's decision of continuing the export of grain and "the priority of feeding workers and soldiers, not feeding hungry peasants" (Kuromiya 665). And the unrealistic quota that had been determined in the Collectivization project within the First Five Year Plan. In fact, other factors like the blockade took place under the condition fueled up by the Five Year Plan.

In conclusion, by evaluating the different factors that lead to the outbreak of Holodomor in 1933, it's reasonable to conclude that although the First Five Year Plan didn't directly evoke the eventual famine, it created the irreversible status quo of hunger that accumulated through the first stage of famine into the second stage of a predeterminate famine. Eventually, it led to events in late 1932 and 1933 that transferred starvation into famine and made the Holodomor inevitable. It is also noticeable that Stalin and his government played a significant role during this emergence and occurrence of famine because all the causation of the famine originated from Stalin's aims and ideology.

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