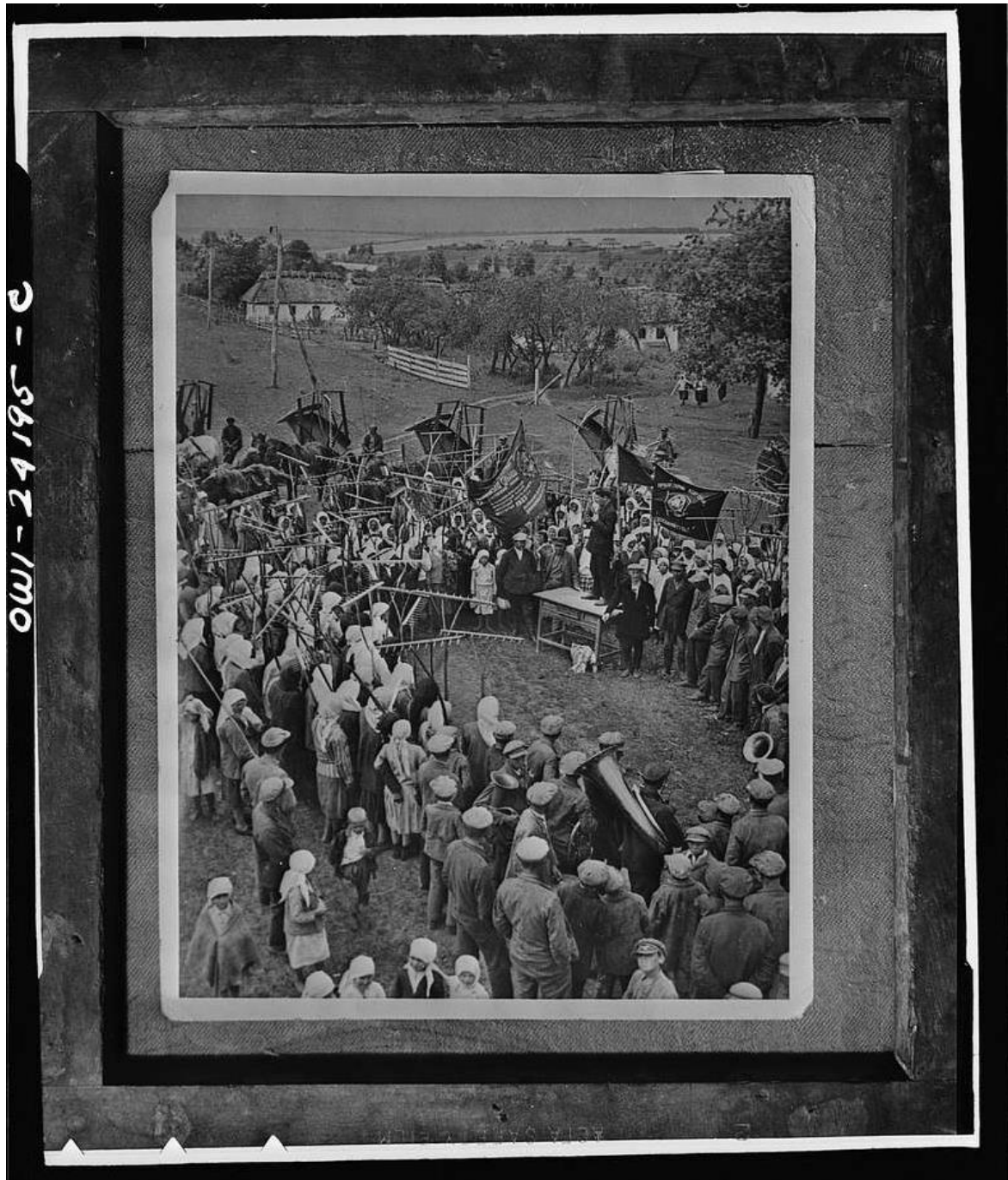


SOURCES ON THE HOLODOMOR

Source 1 – Photo taken of a general meeting to discuss harvesting on a collective farm in a village near Kyiv, 1930. (Source: National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, New York.)



Extension questions: What can you see in this picture? Who do you think is speaking? What can this photo tell us about life as a peasant in Ukraine in 1930?

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Source 2 – A propaganda poster from 1930, saying ‘Let Us Destroy the Kulaks as a Class’. ‘Kulaks’ were peasants who were somewhat wealthier than the others, owning, say, a few animals or a little land. They were more likely to resist collectivisation and were persecuted by the communists.



Extension questions: What can you see in this poster? How are the kulaks depicted? How is the Soviet regime trying to influence public perception of the kulaks'?

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Source 3 – excerpt of a letter from the President of the Executive Committee of Ukrainian Soviets, Grigory Petrovsky, to Stalin, 10 June 1932.

I was in many villages and saw a considerable part of the countryside engulfed in famine, there aren't too many, but there are people swollen from starvation, mainly poor peasants and even middle peasants. They are eating food scraps from the bottom of the barrel, if any are available. During big meetings in the villages, the peasants of course curse me, old women cry and men sometimes do also. Sometimes the criticism of the worsening situation becomes very deep and broad – Why did they create an artificial famine? After all, we had a good harvest. Why did they take away all of the sowing seeds? That did not happen even under the old regime. We didn't have that even under the old regime. Why are Ukrainians forced to make treacherous journeys to find bread in less fertile regions? Why isn't bread being bought here? And so on ... It's difficult, in these conditions, to offer an explanation. ... To conclude, I ask again that you consider all methods and resources available to provide urgent food aid to Ukrainian villages, and to supply buckwheat for sowing as quickly as possible, in order to make up for what has not been sown.

Extension questions: What does this letter tell us about life in the Ukrainian countryside? Why do you think he said, "the peasants curse me"? Why do you think he wrote it at the time he did? Which words in particular can you point to which support your views?

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Source 4 – Excerpt from "The Law on Five Ears of Grain". This was the people's name for the Resolution 'On safekeeping property of socialist property', which came into force on 7 August 1932. Within 6 months of this law being passed, 4,500 peasants had been executed and 100,000 had been imprisoned. Under collectivisation, peasants no longer owned any land, animals or equipment of their own. They worked on communal farms. Some were run by collectives of peasants and some by state employees. 'Kolkhozes' are collective farms.

Public Property (state, kolkhoz, cooperative) [is] the basis of the Soviet system; it is sacred and inviolable, and those attempting to steal public property must be considered enemies of the people ... the decisive struggle against plunderers of public property is the foremost obligation of every organ of Soviet administration.

The Central Executive Committee and Soviet of People's Commissars of the USSR hereby resolve ...

- 1) To regard the property of kolkhozes and cooperative (harvest in stores, etc.) as tantamount to state property.
- 2) To apply as a punitive measure for plundering of kolkhoz and collective property the highest measure of social defence: execution with the confiscation of all property, which may be substituted ... by the deprivation of freedom for a period of no fewer than ten years.

Extension questions: Would you say the punishments detailed in this law are proportionate to the crime of stealing grain? What does this source tell you about how communists view property? Which words in particular can you point to which support your views?

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Source 5 – Letter from Stalin to Lazar Kaganovich, the First Deputy Premier of the Soviet Union, 11 August 1932.

The chief thing now is Ukraine. Things in Ukraine are terrible. It's terrible in the party. They say that in some parts of Ukraine (it seems, Kyiv and Dnipropetrovsk) around 50 district committees have spoken out against the grain requisition plan, considering it unrealistic. In other district committees, it appears the situation is no better. What is this? This is not the party, not a parliament, this is a caricature of a parliament...

If we don't make an effort now to improve the situation in Ukraine, we may lose Ukraine. Keep in mind that [Józef] Piłsudski [Polish Prime Minister, who wanted a free Ukrainian state] is not daydreaming, and his agents in Ukraine are many times stronger than [Stanislav] Redens [head of the secret police in Ukraine] or [Stanisław] Kosior [First Secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine] think. Keep in mind that the Ukrainian Communist Party includes more than a few rotten elements, conscious and unconscious Petliurites [Symon Petliura was a Ukrainian nationalist leader during the Ukrainian War of Independence, 1917-21] as well as direct agents of Piłsudski. As soon as things get worse, these elements will not be slow in opening a front within (and without) the party against the party. The worst thing is that the Ukrainians simply do not see this danger.

Extension questions: What does this source tell you about Stalin's attitudes towards Ukraine and the famine? Which words in particular can you point to which support your views?

SOURCES ON THE HOLODOMOR

Source 6 – Excerpt from Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine* (2017), p.186-7.

Normally, the OGPU [secret police] sent Stalin reports written in careful prose and filled with stock phrases about enemies and conspiracies. But in August 1932 the Ukrainian secret police sent him a straightforward set of quotations without commentary. The quotations were all collected from informers and attributed to Ukrainian party members operating at district level, all of whom were bitterly opposed to the grain requisition campaign. [...]

Almost all the evidence in the document expressed direct defiance of Moscow's orders. 'I will not obey this [grain requisition] plan', one party member was quoted as saying: 'I do not want to accept this plan. I will not complete this grain requisition plan.' And after that, the secret policemen recorded, he 'put his party card on the table and left the room'.

Another had a similar reaction: 'It will be difficult to fight for the completion of this grain requisitions plan, but I know a way out of this difficulty – I'll send my party card to the local council, and then I will be free.'

And a third: 'We will not accept the grain requisitions plan, since in its current form it cannot be fulfilled. And to again force the people to starve is criminal. For me it is better to turn in my Party card than to doom the collective farmers to starve through deceit.' [...]

Had they been deliberately trying to prejudice the Soviet leader against Ukraine, the men of the OGPU could not have chosen a better way, for the report confirmed all of Stalin's worst fears. He had long perceived a clear connection between the grain collection problem in Ukraine and the threat of nationalism in the republic. Now he heard a clear echo of the events of the previous decade: the civil war, the peasant revolt, the Bolshevik setback.

Extension questions: How are communist party members reacting to having to confiscate grain from peasants? What is the significance of the quotations being sent to Stalin *without commentary*? What does this source tell you about Stalin's attitudes towards Ukraine and the famine? Which words in particular can you point to which support your views?

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Source 7 – Letter from Y. Shvets, a collective farmer from the village of Horozhene, Bashtan district, to the President of the Executive Committee of Ukrainian Soviets, Grigory Petrovsky, about grain being taken from the collective farmers leading to starvation.

13 September 1932

Comrade Petrovsky,

In 1931 our cooperative had 2,400 hectares of land and it was completely sown, but as we have a good deal of land close to the river, and it is useless, the district [authorities] directed our cooperative to use this land for particular agricultural needs – growing vegetables, raising cattle and pigs...

Our cooperative has 1,052 people to be fed, and here, in 1931, most of our cooperative members – poor peasants – were starving, beginning in December. In this year of 1932, the cooperative sowed 600 hectares of grain crops...

When the District Executive Committee apportioned the grain-procurement plan, our cooperative was obliged to fulfil a grain-procurement plan of 2,400 poods [about 40,000 kilograms] of grain. But, Comrade Petrovsky, if we stretch it considerably, perhaps there will be enough [grain] to fulfil the established plan, but there will be absolutely nothing left for food...

So please explain to me: has full agreement been reached with our district authorities to leave our village and cooperative hungry for the whole year, or have former landowners perhaps joined the ranks of the authorities and begun to take vengeance for their [lost] estates? Or, perhaps, it is the state of affairs to be hungry under Soviet rule?... When the grain-procurement plan was being discussed at cooperative and executive meetings, and someone says that the plan is very great and that there would be nothing left to eat, our village board immediately threatens us with the police and the GPU...

Extension questions: What are Shvets' attitudes towards the communist authorities taking grain from the collective farms? What can we learn about the relationship between collective farmers and the state? Which words in particular can you point to which support your views?

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Source 8 – Reports by Gareth Jones, at the Berlin Press Conference, 19 March 1933. Jones left Cambridge with a First Class Honours in Russian, German and French in 1929 and became a secretary to former Prime Minister David Lloyd George. He made 3 trips to the Soviet Union in 1930-33. Here he recounts his trip of March 1933. Jones' reporting was discredited by western journalists, such as Walter Duranty, who repeated Moscow's claims that there was no famine.

Everywhere was the cry, 'There is no bread. We are dying. This cry came from every part of Russia, from the Volga, Siberia, White Russia, the North Caucasus, Central Asia. I tramped through the black earth region because that was once the richest farmland in Russia and because the correspondents have been forbidden to go there to see for themselves what is happening.

In the train, a Communist denied to me that there was a famine. I flung a crust of bread which I had been eating from my own supply into a spittoon. A peasant fellow-passenger fished it out and ravenously ate it. I threw an orange peel into the spittoon and the peasant again grabbed it and devoured it. The Communist subsided. I stayed overnight in a village where there used to be 200 oxen and where there now are six. The peasants were eating the cattle fodder and had only a month's supply left.

They told me that many had already died of hunger. Two soldiers came to arrest a thief. They warned me against travel by night as there were too many 'starving' desperate men.

Extension questions: What does this source tell us about the fertility of the land in Ukraine? What can we learn about the contrast between the official propaganda and the reality? Which words in particular can you point to which support your views?

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Source 9 – ‘A Woman from Ukraine Tells of Famine and Cannibalism’ reported by a Canadian newspaper, ‘The Ukrainian Voice’, 13 September 1933. Adapted from a collection of [testimonies](#). It was very rare for Ukrainian farmers to afford the means to move abroad during the famine, however the experiences of famine that the woman describes were typical.

The wife of Ivan Zhuk, a farmer in Consort, Alberta, came to him from the Pervomaisk district near Odesa, Ukraine. On the way, she made a stop in Winnipeg for a few days and was brought to the editorial offices of The Ukrainian Voice by some good people. We have to admit that it was interesting to see this woman; she seemed like someone from another world. Her poor clothing showed that she had not come from prosperous conditions. It will be best to convey our conversation in the form of questions and answers.

Q: When did you leave home?

A: On August 5.

Q: How were people living in Ukraine at that time?

A: There was a terrible famine. People were dying of hunger like flies.

Q: Did many die of hunger?

A: As far as I could learn, 17 miles in either direction, about one-quarter of the population survived. Three-quarters died.

Q: Are people suffering the famine quietly, or are they rebelling?

A: How are they to rebel, and what will they achieve by rebelling? They suffer because they have lost all hope. They walk like the blind, and they fall wherever death strikes them. No one pays attention to the corpses lying on the streets. People either step over or sidestep them and keep on walking. From time to time, they are collected and buried in common pits. Seventy and more people are buried together.

Q: Have you heard anything about instances of cannibalism?

A: Why not? It happens all the time. There have been cases of a mother starving with her children and then killing and eating them when she sees that they are about to die. Or you are walking along the street, and you see a corpse. You look around to see whether anyone is watching, and you cut off a piece of flesh and then bake or cook it.

Q: What is the reason for the famine? Has there been a drought or a bad harvest, or are you not sowing anything?

A: There has been a harvest, we sow and we plant, but as soon as anything grows, they take it all away and pack it off to Moscow. We had a good harvest this summer, but so what?

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They sent in the machines, cut everything, threshed it, and left not a kernel behind. They took everything. People were weeping. They asked, "What will we eat?" But the Chekists [members of the secret police] laughed and answered: "You'll find something." What will people not do in order to hide some grain for themselves! They hide it in their hair, they hide it in their mouth, beneath their tongue, but they [the Chekists] search it out and take it too.

Q: Do people on the collective farms live better?

A: At first they had it better, but now they take everything from them as well. I myself was on a collective farm, and if I have not died so far and could leave, it is only because my husband in Canada sent me money, and I could buy things in the Torgsin shops [state-run hard-currency stores].

Q: Do people not expect something better in the future?

A: They used to, but now things get worse and worse with every year. And now they have reached the limit. No one expects anything anymore; everyone just expects death. Even the officials do not know what the future holds and only shrug their shoulders. Some tell the people, "Rebel, and we will join you." And the people respond: "You rebel first."

[...]

Q: And how do people live in Moscow? In the Moscow region? Is there also a famine there?

A: No, there is no famine there. There is enough of everything. When I arrived in Moscow, I could buy everything I wanted at the bazaar—bread and meat and vegetables.

[...]

Q: They take your wheat and grain, and you have no bread, but may you keep your animals? Cows, horses, chickens, pigs?

A: The famished people ate everything. If anyone still has a horse or cow, they guard it like the greatest treasure. People caught field mice and ate them like the greatest delicacies. The cats and dogs have been eaten long ago. Some collective farms still have pigs, but the Chekists guard them and seize and take them away as soon as they grow fat. People have already forgotten how pork tastes.

Extension questions: What can we learn about living conditions during the famine? What are the attitudes of the collective farmers towards the secret police? Which words in particular can you point to which support your views? What do you make of this exchange being reported in a Canadian newspaper?

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Source 10 – Letter from the collective farmer Mykola Reva to Joseph Stalin about the Famine of 1933 in Ukraine, written on 1 May 1940. It is unclear why Reva wrote such a letter that would surely put his life in danger.

Dear Joseph Vissarionovich [Stalin],

You are, it would seem, our friend, teacher, and father, so the bold idea occurred to me of writing to you with the whole truth....

The dark reaction of the hungry year of 1933, when people ate tree bark, grass, and even their own children, when hundreds of thousands of people died of starvation, and all this before the eyes of the communists, who drove their cars across our bodies and impudently praised life....

...[T]he people were dying of hunger not because there was a poor harvest but because the state took their grain, and that grain lay in the Zahotzerno [Grain Procurement] warehouses in elevators and was being distilled into alcohol for intoxication, while people were dying of hunger.... [I]n 1933, when hungry people gathered grains of corn by the Zahotzerno warehouse at the Khorol station, they were shot like dogs; a detachment of mounted police was dispatched from the town of Khorol, and like lions, with sabres drawn, they pursued us hungry ones, and there was grain in the warehouses, there was flour, but people were dying of hunger, which means that all this was carried out deliberately by the state, and the state knew about this....

The village council does not issue death certificates for 1933 because mortality in that year was so great that in more than fifty years so many people did not die as in that year. Whoever was left alive, having endured such difficulties—that person is already ruined because, as I know from my own experience, we collective farmers were swollen from hunger, we fell on our feet, we lost our ability to think, we lost a certain percentage of our eyesight, there is no health, no strength, a general weakness of the bodily organism, and a great incidence of hospital visits and many sick people in those areas where the year 1933 made itself felt. All this took place before the eyes of the communists—how can they not be sorrowful and ashamed that they could not besiege the higher authorities and sound the alarm about this misfortune, so that it would not exist.... [T]he communists cared more for their own skins, for if anyone endeavoured to stand up for the people with a mere word, his fate would be settled along with ours. That is how we are valued, Joseph Vissarionovich....

Extension: How does Mykola Reva view Stalin? What is Reva's attitude to the communists? Why do you think he wrote this letter, 7 years after the famine? Which words in particular can you point to which support your views?