

Activity 1 – Holodomor Timeline

Read through this timeline, thinking about: *What did Stalin know of the famine and when? What measures did the Communist Party introduce that may have made the famine worse?*

Extension: what can you learn from these facts regarding Stalin's attitude to the famine?

1922 The communist Soviet Union took over Ukraine. Collectivisation began modestly under Lenin's 'co-operative plan'. Under collectivisation, peasants gave up their individual smallholdings to join large collective farms.

1924 Joseph Stalin became leader of the Soviet Union.

1929 Stalin began actively forcing peasants to join collective farms. Peasants refusing to collectivise were exiled to the gulag (forced labour prison camps often in remote and freezing cold locations). Financial penalties were also used: collective farmers paid a tax of 5-7% of their income, whereas other peasants had to pay 7-70%.

1930 Communist activists from towns were sent to the Ukrainian countryside to confiscate grain. Ukraine's grain quota to Moscow was raised to 115% above the 1926-27 level. There were 38,500 activists sent in 1930 and this increased to 112,000 in 1932. The Soviet Union exploited Ukraine's fertile soil: Ukrainian farmers made up 27% of the Soviet Union's total harvest, but the collection quotas for Ukraine were disproportionately high, making up 38% of the total.

10 Mar 1930 65% of farms and 70% of working animals had been collectivised.

1931 Official data stated the harvest was 18.3 million tonnes of grain. The **actual harvest was 11-13 million tonnes, of which 7 million tonnes were confiscated.** This left each peasant with an average of only 112kg of grain to consume across a year – just over 1000 calories per day. Grain was confiscated so that the Soviet Union could export it for foreign currency or to feed the cities.

10 Jun 1932 Grigory Petrovsky and Vlas Chubar both wrote letters detailing the famine to Stalin. Petrovsky: "I was in many villages and saw a considerable part of the countryside engulfed in famine." Chubar: "In March and April, there were tens of thousands of malnourished, starving and swollen people dying from famine in every village; children abandoned by their parents and orphans appeared." Stalin was unsympathetic.

- 7 Aug 1932** **Stalin passed a law to punish taking leftover grain from collective farms by 10 years' imprisonment or death.** Within 6 months of the 'Law on Five Ears of Grain', as it became known amongst peasants, 100,000 Ukrainians had been sent to hard labour camps and 4,500 had been executed.
- 11 Aug 1932** **Stalin wrote a letter to his number two, Lazar Kaganovich, fearing that Ukrainian nationalism would lead the USSR to "lose Ukraine".** Stalin wrote, "The Ukrainian Communist Party...contains quite a few (yes, many!) rotten elements and unconscious Petliurites... Without these and similar measures [of repression]...we may lose Ukraine."
- 20 Nov 1932** **'Blacklist system' to penalise villages that failed to meet grain quotas.** Blacklisted villages would have their grain supplies and livestock confiscated as well as their trade cut off and the area cordoned by secret policemen. A total of 37 of the 392 districts in Ukraine were 'blacklisted'.
- Nov 1932** **Ukraine's autumn harvest came out 60% lower than expected by communist leaders.** The official harvest was 13.4-14.7 million tonnes but 40-50% of this was lost during harvesting. Moscow confiscated 5 million tonnes. This left the average peasant with just 83 kg of grain – around 750 calories per day.
- 31 Dec 1932** **Special passport system prevented peasants from travelling to live or work in cities,** where factory workers were still allowed a small amount of pay and food.
- 22 Jan 1933** **Stalin closed the borders of Ukraine so people could not leave the famine areas.** In March 1933, the secret police reported to Stalin that it had caught 219,460 peasants away from their regions in search of food. They sent 186,588 back to where they came from and arrested the others.
- 4 April 1933** **Renowned Russian writer Mikhail Sholokhov wrote a letter to Stalin about famine in his region:** "In this region, as in other regions, collective farmers and individual farmers are now dying of starvation; adults and children swell up and eat everything that a person is not supposed to eat, starting with carrion and ending with oak bark and all kinds of swamp roots." Sholokhov was a supporter of Stalin.
- 1932-1933** **One event which did not happen:** whereas in 1921-23, during a previous famine, the Soviet Union accepted international relief aid which saved many lives, Stalin did not request or accept any aid in 1932-33.