

Soviet Agricultural Policies in the Ukraine and the 1921–1922 Famine*

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For centuries the Ukraine has been a great grain-producing region, the famed “granary” of Europe. Yet one part of this rich agricultural region, the steppe or southern Ukraine, suffered an extreme shortage of food in 1921–1922. There famine marked the terminus of the Revolution of 1917, as a decade later, in 1932–1933, famine throughout the Ukraine would end the “Revolution from above” of 1929.

Several authors have already written on this topic.¹ Some have singled out drought as the famine’s primary and immediate cause.² But in 1921–1922 drought affected the entire Ukraine, whereas only the steppe region experienced famine conditions. Also, the steppe itself had previously survived even more severe droughts — in 1869 and 1885, for example³ — without such tragic consequences.

Undoubtedly, drought was a reason for the poor harvest that year, but it did not cause the famine. As another author, Herasymovyč, has pointed out, the main factor causing famine conditions in the steppe Ukraine in 1921–1922 was not weather, nor any other natural factor, nor even civil war: it was the Soviet government’s policies in 1919–1921, specifically, its land and food requisition policies.⁴

From the very beginning of the Soviet regime, Bolshevik leaders viewed the Ukraine as a source of grain. A telegram from Lenin to

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¹ Among them are H. H. Fisher, *The Famine in Soviet Russia, 1919–1923* (Stanford, Calif., and London, 1935), and Ivan Herasymovyč, *Holod na Ukrajinii* (Berlin, 1922).

² For instance, Fisher, *Famine in Soviet Russia*, p. 255.

³ *Itogi bor'by s golodom v 1921–22 gg.: Sbornik statej i očetov* (Moscow, 1922), p. 253.

⁴ Herasymovyč, *Holod na Ukrajinii*, pp. 35–82.

Ordžonikidze and Antonov-Ovseenko dated 15 January 1918 called for "grain, grain, grain!" and ordered that it be sent every day to Soviet Russia.⁵ The purpose of the German-Austrian occupation of the Ukraine in 1918 was also to assure the export of grain, as promised by the Rada government in a secret protocol of 25 January 1918.⁶ By an agreement made on April 23 of that year, the Ukraine was to supply the Axis powers with one million tons of grain and other products by the end of July.⁷ In fact, only 65,000 tons were exported,⁸ for in 1918 the food situation was extremely grave throughout the Ukraine, especially in Kiev and Odessa.⁹ The Germans' difficulty in requisitioning grain was due mainly to peasant protest. In early June a peasant uprising exploded in the district of Zvenyhorodka, south of Kiev.¹⁰ Eighteen partisan divisions comprising 25,000 men took up arms.¹¹ The uprising spread to the Tarašča district. During the German occupation, 30,000 German and Austrian soldiers were killed in the battle with Ukrainian peasants.¹²

In the spring of 1919, there were two Soviet military detachments in the Ukraine, in which the Bolsheviks and Ukrainian peasants fought side-by-side. One, centered in Kiev, was called the first Soviet Ukrainian division: it included peasants from Tarašča and Zvenyhorodka. The other, centered in Xarkiv and called the second Soviet Ukrainian division, comprised Hryhorijiv's peasant troops, the Maxno army, and the Dybenko brigade.¹³ But soon afterwards cooperation between the Bolsheviks and the peasants ceased. The Bolshevik government had

⁵ V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij*, 5th ed., 55 vols. (Moscow, 1958–1965), 50: 30.

⁶ W. Bihl, *Österreich-Ungarn und die Friedensschlüsse von Brest-Litowsk* (Vienna, 1970), pp. 99–100. *Krax germanskoj okkupacii na Ukraine* (Moscow, 1936), p. 30.

⁷ W. Groener, "Tagebuch und Aufzeichnungen Wilhelm Groeners," in Winfried Baumgart, comp., *Von Brest-Litovsk zur Deutschen Novemberrevolution: Aus den Tagebüchern, Briefen und Aufzeichnungen von Alfons Paquet, Wilhelm Groener, und Albert Hopman. März bis November 1918*. (Göttingen, 1971), p. 350.

⁸ P. Borowsky, *Deutsche Ukrainepolitik 1918* (Lübeck/Hamburg, 1970), p. 190.

⁹ Bihl, *Österreich-Ungarn*, p. 125.

¹⁰ I. Kulik, "Revolucionnoe dviženie na Ukraine," *Žizn' nacional'nostej*, 1919, no. 4 (12), p. 2. N. Suprunenko, *Očerki istorii graždanskoj vojny i inostrannoj voennoj intervencii na Ukraine* (Moscow, 1967), p. 61.

¹¹ I. Kapulovskij, "Organizacija vosstanija protiv getmana," *Letopis' revoljucii*, 1923, no. 4, p. 98.

¹² O. Fedyshyn, *Germany's Drive to the East and the Ukrainian Revolution, 1917–1918* (New Brunswick, N. J., 1971), p. 187.

¹³ *Iz istorii graždanskoj vojny v SSSR*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1960), pp. 641–642, 668. "Iz istorii graždanskoj vojny na Ukraine v 1918 g.," *Krasnyj arxiv*, 1939, no. 4, p. 73.

proved to be very similar to the German troops where grain requisitions were concerned.¹⁴

The Land Policy of the Soviet Government in 1919

On 11 February 1919, the Provisional Soviet Workers' and Peasants' Government of the Ukraine issued a decree calling for the nationalization of landowners' estates so as to organize state farms — in Ukrainian, *radhospy* (Russian *sovkhozy*). It was decided that sugar plantations and beet fields should also be nationalized.¹⁵ The Third Congress of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of the Ukraine, which was held in March, also passed a resolution calling for the transformation of private land management to cooperative management and for the organization of *radhospy* and communes.¹⁶

In the spring of 1919, almost all estates in the Ukraine formerly held by landowners were duly reorganized. For example, in the Kiev province 1.9 million *desjatyny* (1 *desjatyna* = 2.7 acres) were nationalized, leaving only 80,000 *desjatyny* in private hands. By July of that year, 1,256 *radhospy* comprising 1,202,514 *desjatyny* of land had been organized.¹⁷

To quote the Soviet historian, P. M. Ponomarenko: "The Soviet authorities in power in the Ukraine in 1919 did not carry out a land policy in sympathy with the peasants there. Middle and poor peasants were allotted only small lots of land."¹⁸ The peasants responded with opposition to the Soviet policy as a whole.¹⁹ One writer, M. Kubanin, says that poor peasants were in the vanguard of the opposition.²⁰ Certainly these people, for the first time seeing the possibility of owning land of their own, did not embrace the Soviet policy of collectivization.

After the spring of 1919 revolts against Soviet power broke out throughout the Ukraine. In the Kiev province alone, five hundred

¹⁴ More detailed information on the Ukraine in 1919 can be found in A. Adams, *Bolsheviks in the Ukraine* (New Haven, 1963).

¹⁵ M. Kubanin, *Maxnovščina* (Leningrad, 1927), p. 54.

¹⁶ A. A. Borodin and P. P. Bačinskij, "Kopartija Ukrainy v bor'be za osuščestvlenie rešenij VIII s'ezda RKP(B) po krest'janskomu voprosu," *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, 1960, no. 1, p. 75.

¹⁷ Suprunenko, *Očerki istorii*, pp. 195, 198.

¹⁸ P. M. Ponomarenko, "O politike partii v ukraïnskoj derevne v 1919–1920 gg.," *Voprosy istorii*, 1956, no. 8, p. 106.

¹⁹ Suprunenko, *Očerki istorii*, p. 199, quotes one peasant as saying, "If management is large, we shall become tenant farmers again."

²⁰ Kubanin, *Maxnovščina*, p. 55.

peasant uprisings occurred.²¹ Among them was the revolt led by Zelenyj (pseudonym of D. Terpylo) in the Trypillja region. On 28 March 1919, the Soviet Ukrainian government issued a formal denunciation of Zelenyj's revolt.²² According to a report dated April 1, the regions taken by the insurgents were mainly Ržyšiv, Trypillja, and Obuxiv. Two thousand men fought against the government with two cannons and forty machine guns. The roads connecting the city of Kiev with the southern regions were cut off. Those who commanded the Zelenyj revolt proclaimed their opposition to the land policy of the Soviet authorities and the forcible organization of communes. They also accused the Soviet authorities of expropriating all but a small amount of grain from the peasants.²³

Toward the end of April and throughout May 1919, a large portion of the Soviet army was thrown against the Zelenyj forces. We do not know exactly how many men Zelenyj had, but since the Soviets, hard pressed on other fronts as they were, sent 6,150 men to fight against them, the number must have been fairly large. It is said that by the beginning of May, 14,000 Soviet soldiers were mobilized against the "bandits" in Kiev province alone, so we can conclude that the resistance of peasants was strong in many regions.²⁴

In June 1919, the Soviet forces sent to suppress the peasants were defeated miserably at what later was called the "Tragedy of Trypillja." After the defeat fresh Soviet detachments led by Ja. Jakovliv²⁵ and Skrypnyk were sent to Trypillja. The region was occupied by July 2, and the Zelenyj forces fled south.²⁶ Though skirmishes continued until October, the uprising had been crushed. Zelenyj himself had died in battle.²⁷ Clearly, however, the land policy of the authorities had alienated the peasants from Soviet

²¹ Borodin and Bačinskij, "Kompartija Ukrainy," p. 76.

²² *Graždanskaja vojna na Ukraine, 1918–1920: Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, 4 vols. (Kiev, 1967), 1, pt. 1: 697. *Kievščina v gody vojny i inostrannoju voennoj intervencii (1918–1920 gg.): Sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Kiev, 1962), pp. 184–85.

²³ V. Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski o graždanskoj vojne*, 4 vols. (Moscow and Leningrad, 1924–1933), 3: 340, 4: 171.

²⁴ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, 4: 174–76.

²⁵ In 1919–1920, Jakovliv was the head of the Katerynoslav and Kiev *gubkom* of the CP(b)U. He later became People's Commissar of Agriculture of the Soviet Union.

²⁶ *Graždanskaja vojna na Ukraine*, 2: 263, 792.

²⁷ *Vos'maja konferencija RKP(b): Protokoly* (Moscow, 1961), p. 277. We do not know in which battle Zelenyj perished.

power. Later even Bolshevik leaders would admit that the majority of peasants taking part in the Trypillja uprising were poor.²⁸

Although there were some attempts to stop the collectivization policy in the Ukraine as early as the spring of 1919, serious revision of land policy by the Soviet government began only at the end of that year. At the Eighth Party Conference of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik), which was held in Moscow from 2 to 4 December 1919, the problem of the Ukraine was discussed, particularly the failure of the land policy of 1919. Among the discussants were Ja. Jakovliv, Rakovs'kyj, chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Ukraine, Manujil's'kyj, Bubnov, and Lenin. Jakovliv summarized events thus:

The Soviet authorities were defeated twice in the Ukraine. The first time, they were defeated because of bad strategy. The Red Army, which is quite young, could not fight against the German army, which was throwing enormous forces into the Ukraine. The second defeat, however, was not strategical or military, but social and political. It was due to a policy which had not taken into consideration the situation of the peasants in the Ukraine.²⁹

Jakovliv urged that the land policy of 1919 be revised and called for the implementation of the land decree issued in October 1917. He also argued that to the peasants state farms and collective farms were no better than the landowners' estates and that all land holdings of landowners must be liquidated.³⁰ Lenin supported Jakovliv, maintaining that cooperation with the Ukrainian peasants was imperative: "I believe we need their cooperation; therefore, we ought to divide among the peasants a larger part of the *sovkhozy*."³¹

Article 7 of the resolution on the Ukraine at the Eighth Party Conference dealt with land policy. It read: "The *radhosp* must be organized to the benefit of peasants and organized only in case of strict necessity. . . . Peasants should not be forcibly organized into communes and *artili* [workmen's associations]."³² Based on this resolution, the All-Ukrainian Revolutionary Committee passed, in Xarkiv on

²⁸ *Vos'maja konferencija RKP(b)*, pp. 97, 115. The attitude of other partisan leaders against the land policy of the Soviet government was similar. The Borot'-bist Shums'kyi was almost lynched when he mentioned the word "commune" at Hryhorijiv's camp. See Adams, *Bolsheviks*, pp. 272-74.

²⁹ *Vos'maja konferencija RKP(b)*, p. 80.

³⁰ *Vos'maja konferencija RKP(b)*, p. 85.

³¹ *Vos'maja konferencija RKP(b)*, pp. 111-12.

³² *KPSS v rezoljucijax i rešenijax s'ezdov, konferencijax i plenumov CK*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1970), pp. 124-26.

5 February 1920, a law on land redistribution. It allowed all lands confiscated from landowners and monasteries by the Soviet government to be used by Ukrainian peasants without any payment on their part. The *radhospy* formed in 1919 could also be used by peasants having little or no land.³³ Clearly, the Soviet government was trying to make amends. As a result, 15.5 million *desjatyny* were distributed among the peasants. Land held by peasants in Katerynoslav and Tavrida increased, from an average of 8 to 13 *desjatyny*. On the other hand, the number of *radhospy* decreased from 1,185 to 640, and their land holdings fell from 1,104,600 to 340,759 *desjatyny*.³⁴ In 1920, the provinces of Kiev, Poltava, Mykolajiv, Odessa, Černihiv, and Katerynoslav had 6,857,077 *desjatyny* of arable land. In these provinces land assigned to *radhospy* totaled only 16,302 *desjatyny*, to communes 253 *desjatyny*, and to *artili* 557 *desjatyny*.³⁵

Grain Requisition Policy

When a Soviet government was established for the second time in the Ukraine in 1919, Lenin wrote in *Pravda*:

The victory of the Soviets in the Ukraine have opened for us the best perspectives. Now we are able to get enough grain. . . . The surplus grain in the Ukraine is enormous, and the Soviet government in the Ukraine offers to help us. Now we need not fear lack of foodstuffs We must send food requisition troops out there.³⁶

From January 1919, the party's interest in the Ukraine seemed to concentrate on the problem of grain. On April 3, at a plenum of the Moscow soviet, Lenin stated, "The circumstances of the Republic are now better because we have 258 million *puds* [1 *pud* = 40 pounds] of grain in the Ukraine."³⁷ He also wrote:

In the Ukraine there is an enormous amount of surplus grain. . . . The Bolsheviks in the north must assist their comrades in the Ukraine in their work of requisition. We ought to collect 150 million *puds* of grain on the strength of an efficient system and on the strength of arms by the first of June.³⁸

³³ *Radjans'ke budivnyctvo na Ukrajinі v roky hromadjans'koji vijny: Zbirnyk dokumentiv i materialiv* (Kiev, 1957), pp. 59–61.

³⁴ S. N. Semanov, "Maxnovščina i eë kras," *Voprosy istorii*, 1966, no. 9, p. 53. Kubanin, *Maxnovščina*, p. 132.

³⁵ Calculated from *Statistika Ukrainy*, ser. 2, vol. 2, nos. 1–6: *Itogi sel'sko-chozjajstvennoj perepisi 1920 g.* (Xarkiv, 1922).

³⁶ Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij*, 37: 465–68.

³⁷ Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij*, 38: 250.

³⁸ Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij*, 38: 68–69.

In Russia itself, the population was in desperate straits. On February 1, *Pravda* reported:

Soviet Russia as a whole is on the brink of starvation. But the Soviet Ukrainian Army has captured the left-bank region of the Ukraine. There Comrade Rakov's'kyj is the leader and he is the best friend of Soviet Russia. Now they are offering to send us grain, sugar, and other materials. . . . We must carry these goods away by all means.³⁹

In March 1919, at the Eighth Congress of the RCP(b), Šliхter, commissar of food in the Ukraine at that time, received a memorandum from Lenin urging that the Ukrainian government transport 50 million *puds* of grain from the Ukraine to Russia, using extreme emergency methods if necessary; otherwise "we will all collapse."⁴⁰ In fact, the requisition of food in the Ukraine was soon controlled directly from Moscow, because on 12 January 1919, the Ukrainian People's Commissar of Food was made subordinate to the All-Russian People's Commissar of Food.⁴¹ The amount of grain to be requisitioned in the Ukraine in 1919 was set at 139 million *puds*. Only 10.5 million *puds* was collected, however, and only 3 million *puds* — 6 percent of the proposed amount — was sent to Russia.⁴² The requisition failed because the peasants refused to cooperate.⁴³

At the end of 1919, Bolshevik leaders in the Ukraine analyzed why the requisition had failed so miserably. Jakovliv concluded:

The process of grain requisition was crazy and the real amount of grain held by middle-class peasants was not taken into consideration. Also we took a great amount of grain out of the Ukraine to Russia, and it provoked anti-Soviet feeling among the peasants, especially against the policy of grain requisition.⁴⁴ From the peasants' point of view, many political organizations came out of the cities, and each one demanded grain. In this sense, to them the Soviet government was no different from that of Denikin or Germany. Soviet power in the Ukraine must explain, therefore, that it is not the agent of grain requisition for Russians.⁴⁵ Rakov's'kyj stated:

³⁹ "Za xlebom i uglem!," *Pravda*, 1 February 1919 (no. 23).

⁴⁰ A. G. Šliхter, "Bor'ba za xleb na Ukraine v 1919 g.," *Letopis' revoljucii*, 1928, no. 2, pp. 102–104.

⁴¹ *The Trotsky Papers*, vol. 1 (The Hague and Paris, 1964), p. 558.

⁴² Suprunenko, *Očerki istorii*, p. 213.

⁴³ James Mace, in an unpublished manuscript entitled "Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation: National Communism in Soviet Ukraine, 1918–1933," writes that the peasants reacted violently to the forcible requisition. Hryhorijiv called upon the peasants to "kill the hooknosed commissars" who wanted to take their grain to supply "the feeding stalls of Muscovy" (p. 40).

⁴⁴ *Vos'maja konferencija RKP(b)*, p. 84.

⁴⁵ *Vos'maja konferencija RKP(b)*, pp. 81, 84.

We came to the Ukraine when Soviet Russia was experiencing the worst food situation. We approached the Ukraine from the point of view that we must use the Ukraine to a maximum in order to relieve the food shortage in Russia. Such an approach, however, had defects. The purpose of forming *radhospy* was also to take the maximum amount of grain from them.⁴⁶

Bubnov stated that in 1919 Soviet power in the Ukraine was supported not by Ukrainian peasants, but by armed trains, and that grain requisition troops were moving with the armed trains.⁴⁷ Hence "in the summer of 1919, the Soviet government was crushed by Ukrainian peasants," in Manujil's'kyj's words.⁴⁸

The Bolsheviks changed their land policy in the Ukraine at the Eighth Conference of the RCP(b) because they attributed the failure of the grain requisition to a policy which did not give land to peasants. In Jakovliv's words, "one of the reasons why we cannot collect grain efficiently is the mistaken land policy. It does not give land to peasants, but rather brought it under state control under the pretext of 'all for the nation.'"⁴⁹ Although the Soviet's land policy was modified in 1920 to the benefit of the peasants, the grain and food policy remained unchanged and, indeed, was pursued more vigorously.

On 26 February 1920, the Soviet government of the Ukraine issued a decree on food requisition that obliged peasants to sell grain to the Soviet government at official prices.⁵⁰ The amount of grain to be requisitioned and the manner of requisition were to differ from province to province, as shown in the following tables:

Table 1
Proposed Grain Requisitions
(in million *puds*)
1 January 1920 to 1 July 1920⁵¹

Donec'	1.10	Odessa	16.95
Volyn'	2.10	Poltava	24.00
Katerynoslav	37.90	Podillja	5.20
Kiev	13.55	Xarkiv	9.75
Xerson	47.16	Černihiv	2.80

⁴⁶ *Vos'maja konferencija RKP(b)*, pp. 95–96.

⁴⁷ *Vos'maja konferencija RKP(b)*, p. 102.

⁴⁸ *Vos'maja konferencija RKP(b)*, p. 107.

⁴⁹ *Vos'maja konferencija RKP(b)*, pp. 113–14.

⁵⁰ *Radjans'ke budivnyctvo*, p. 70.

⁵¹ *Radjans'ke budivnyctvo*, p. 71.

Table 2
 Official Prices of Grain in 1920
 (in rubles per pud)⁵²

<i>Province</i>	<i>Wheat</i>	<i>Rye</i>	<i>Oats</i>	<i>Barley</i>	<i>Millet</i>
Donec'	48	37	37	34	45
Katerynoslav	48	37	37	34	45
Volyn'	56	44	44	39	49
Kiev	56	44	44	39	49
Odessa	44	34	34	31	41
Poltava	55	42	42	38	48
Xerson	44	34	34	31	41
Xarkiv	55	42	42	38	48
Černihiv	58	46	46	41	48
Podillja	53	43	43	38	46

As indicated, grain requisitions in Katerynoslav and Xerson were extremely heavy. Also, official prices in Katerynoslav and Xerson, as well as in Odessa and Donec', were considerably lower than elsewhere. Article 6 of the decree allowed local organizations to take a portion of the grain collected. In the Černihiv, Kiev, Xarkiv, Podillja, and Volyn' provinces they were permitted to appropriate 25 percent of the grain collected, but in the Katerynoslav, Odessa, Xerson, and Donec' provinces they were allowed only 10 percent.⁵³ It is evident that the southern provinces of the Ukraine — the steppe regions — were singled out in the requisition.

On April 15, the plenum of the Central Committee of the CP(b)U decreed the formation of so-called *Komnezamy*, that is, *Komitety nezamožnyx seljan* (Committees of poor peasants). The *Komnezamy* were to be the executors of the party's land and grain policies in the villages. A decree of 9 May 1920, issued by the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee, set the tasks of the *Komnezamy* as (1) distribution of land, (2) fulfillment of grain requisition quotas, and (3) vanquishing insurgents.⁵⁴

⁵² *Radjans'ke budivnyctvo*, p. 72.

⁵³ *Radjans'ke budivnyctvo*, p. 72. Suprunenko, *Očerki istorii*, p. 370. In 1919, too, official grain prices were fixed which differed from province to province; however, prices in the steppe region were equal to or higher than in Kiev or Černihiv. See *Sobranie zakononij i rasporjaženij raboče-krest'janskogo pravitel'stva Ukrainy*, no. 8, 9–11 February 1919, p. 119.

⁵⁴ *Radjans'ke budivnyctvo*, pp. 84–87. J. Borys, *The Russian Communist Party and the Sovietization of Ukraine* (Stockholm, 1960), p. 274.

The creation of the *Komnezamy* was an important step in the Sovietization of Ukrainian villages. Significantly, it was taken after the Soviet government acknowledged its complete failure in grain requisition. Membership in the new organizations was mostly non-Ukrainian, for example, at the first and second congresses of the *Komnezamy* less than a fourth of the delegates spoke in Ukrainian.⁵⁵ It is also noteworthy that the formation of *Komnezamy* proceeded much more slowly in the steppe regions, such as Katerynoslav, than in Kiev or Xarkiv.⁵⁶

Apart from the formation of the *Komnezamy*, detachments charged with food requisition were sent to the villages. From April to September 1920, about 15,000 workers were mobilized for this purpose by the CP(b)U and labor unions in the Ukraine.⁵⁷ The Ukrainian People's Commissar of Food mobilized 5,953 persons for food requisition in 1920,⁵⁸ and in Xarkiv one-third of the members of the city soviet were mobilized for this purpose.⁵⁹ Food detachments were also sent to the Ukraine from Russia. From August to December 1920, a total of twenty-three food requisition units were active in Xarkiv province; among them were eleven detachments from Russia. In November 1920 there were five detachments from Russia and three local detachments in Poltava.⁶⁰ During the fall of 1920, a total of 262 detachments were requisitioning food in the Ukraine; nevertheless, less than one-third of the districts fulfilled their quota.⁶¹ As legal grounds for the food requisition policy, two major decrees were issued by the Soviet government: a "decree on monopoly of food" in May 1918, and a "decree on food requisitioning" in January 1919. These two were essentially quite different. The first called for surplus grain to be taken from the peasants. Surplus was taken to mean any grain over double the amount needed by the peasants themselves; in other words, it was calculated according to the factual existence of grain and the needs of the peasantry. But the second decree changed this concept completely:

⁵⁵ Borys, *Russian Communist Party*, p. 275.

⁵⁶ *Komitety nezamožnyx seljan Ukraïny, 1920–1933: Zbirnyk dokumentiv i materialiv* (Kiev, 1968), pp. 40, 100. M. I. Remnev, "Dejatel'nost' komitetov nezamožnyx seljan na Ukraïne v 1920 godu," *Voprosy istorii*, 1954, no. 4, p. 97.

⁵⁷ Suprunenko, *Očerki istorii*, p. 370.

⁵⁸ L. N. Mel'nikova, *Bor'ba KP(b)U za osuščestvlenie prodovol'stvennoj politiki (konec 1919–seredina 1921 gg.)* (Kiev, 1972), p. 17.

⁵⁹ Suprunenko, *Očerki istorii*, p. 370.

⁶⁰ "Iz istorii bor'by prodovol'stvennyx otrjadov rabočix za xleb i ukreplenie soveckoj vlasti," *Krasnyj arxiv*, 1938, nos. 4–5, pp. 139–43.

⁶¹ Mel'nikova, *Bor'ba KP(b)U*, pp. 18–19.

surplus grain was now calculated exclusively on the basis of the needs of the state. The amount no longer had any relation to any real surplus and could be set wholly arbitrarily.⁶²

A decree of August 1918 divided the grain collected by food requisition troops equally between the People's Commissar of Food and the troops themselves. Thus the troops were assured of eating well as long as they collected grain, a fact sometimes forgotten because their consumption of grain was not recorded. During the German and Austrian occupation of the Ukraine, half a million German soldiers and a quarter-million Austrian soldiers ate more grain than the amount sent back to Germany and Austria. The same can probably be said about the requisitioning troops from Russia in the Ukraine. Their activity was not confined to collecting food, however. Usually their first task upon coming to a village was to organize a *Komnezam*, of which they then were members as long as they stayed in that particular village.⁶³

Harsh treatment, abuse, and outright theft by the requisitioning troops contributed greatly to peasant protest and revolt. In an effort to quell such demonstrations, an order was issued in February 1921 by the Soviet government prohibiting the troops from (1) making arbitrary arrests, (2) beating or threatening anyone with execution without sufficient reason, (3) distilling vodka from collected grain, (4) public drunkenness.⁶⁴

On 6 September 1920, the Ukrainian People's Commissar of Internal Affairs widely broadened the responsibilities of the *Komnezamy*. They became not only the organ for Sovietization of Ukrainian villages, but also the executive organs of local government and the local police.⁶⁵ At the first All-Ukrainian Congress of *Komnezamy*, it was resolved that the most urgent task before the committees was to fight

⁶² D. A. Baevskij, *Očerki po istorii xozjajstvennogo stroitel'stva perioda graždanskoi vojny* (Moscow, 1957), pp. 49, 56. E. G. Gimpel'son, "Voennyj kommunizm": *Politika, praktika, ideologija* (Moscow, 1973), pp. 58-60.

⁶³ *Vos'moj s'ezd RKP(b)* (Moscow, 1959), p. 250. Ju. S. Kulyšev and V. I. Hosač, *Partijnaja organizacija i rabočie Petrograda v gody graždanskoi vojny (1918-1920 gg.)* (Leningrad, 1971), p. 255. Also see N. Ponjatovskaja, "Prodoval'stvennaja politika Sovetskogo gosudarstva v 1918-20 gg.," *Ekonomičeskie nauki*, 1968, no. 12, p. 54.

⁶⁴ Ponjatovskaja, "Prodoval'stvennaja politika," p. 54. Gert Meyer, "Die Beziehungen zwischen Stadt und Land in Sowjetrußland zu Beginn der Neuen Ökonomischen Politik. Das Problem der Smyčka, 1921-1923" (Ph.D. diss., University of Marburg/Lahn, 1971), pp. 65, 82-85.

⁶⁵ *Radjans'ke budivnyctvo*, pp. 113-17.

against rich Ukrainian peasants (*kurkuli*) and bandits, especially the Maxno army, which was in control of the steppe provinces.⁶⁶

At the end of 1920, there were about 6,000 Komnezamy in the Ukraine, comprising 820,000 members. One of their tasks was to disarm the Ukrainian villages. For example, in 1921, the village of Voznesens'k in the district of Oleksandrivs'k was asked by its Komnezam to hand over all weapons. The peasants came forth with 69 rifles, 9 pistols, 11 sabers, 65 sawed-off rifles, 18 bombs, and assorted other items. A few days later the village was searched by Komnezam members who found an additional 41 rifles, 35 sawed-off rifles, 14 sabers, 5 bomb, 15 pistols, and many rounds of ammunition. Several days later still another weapons search by the Komnezam yielded 11 rifles, 5 pistols, 1 bomb, 28 sawed-off rifles, and other items. Apparently, villages in the steppe Ukraine at that time had little grain but plenty of weapons.⁶⁷

The amount of grain to be requisitioned in the Ukraine in 1920 was set at about 160 million *puds*. Over 100 million *puds*, or 62.5 percent of the total, was to be collected from the steppe regions, which, the Soviet government maintained, was least affected by the civil war and hence should have much surplus grain.⁶⁸ Though the requisition was conducted very strictly, the amount collected was grossly insufficient: it amounted to 9,721,000 *puds*, or again only 6 percent of the proposed amount.⁶⁹ The reason for the difficulty lay in the protests of the peasants. On 15 October 1920, Lenin stated:

We obtained grain from Siberia. But we have not been able to get it from the Ukraine. In the Ukraine a war is going on, and the Red army is inevitably fighting with peasant-bandits. There is quite a lot of grain in the Ukraine. There should be more grain than in the Kuban region. But so far almost nothing has been taken.⁷⁰

If the amount of grain actually requisitioned is compared to the amount proposed for requisition from 1918 to 1920, the same percentage — 6 percent — results, regardless whether the requisitioners were the Germans or the Soviet government.

⁶⁶ *Radjans'ke budivnyctvo*, p. 157. Remnev, "Dejatel'nost' komitetov," pp. 98, 103. On the Komnezamy see also S. Kagan, *Agrarnaja revoljucija na Kievščine* (Kiev, 1923).

⁶⁷ Kubanin, *Maxnovščina*, pp. 140–41.

⁶⁸ V. P. Jubkin, "Zdijsnennja prodovol'čoji polityky na Ukrajinі (hruden' 1919–1920 pp.)," *Ukrajins'kyj istoryčnyj žurnal*, 1961, no. 1, p. 22.

⁶⁹ Kubanin, *Maxnovščina*, p. 127.

⁷⁰ Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij*, 41: 364–65.

In 1920 and 1921 the struggle between peasant forces and Soviet troops in the Ukrainian villages became so bitter and violent as to resemble a civil war. Vladimirov, the Ukrainian People's Commissar of Food Affairs, reported that 1,700 men requisitioning food in the Ukraine had been killed by peasants as of January 1921.⁷¹

The struggle between the peasants and the Soviet troops was most bitter in the steppe region, the primary target of the requisitioning. The steppe region, the so-called *čornozem* ('black soil zone'), is mostly flat and covers 44 percent of the whole Ukraine. From 1911 to 1915 on the average the steppe produced 40 percent of the Ukraine's grain, and a large portion was exported from the region,⁷² as shown below.

Table 3
Agriculture in the Ukraine before World War I⁷³
(annual average from 1909 to 1913)

	<i>Whole Ukraine</i>	<i>The Steppe</i>	<i>Other than the Steppe</i>
Sowed land (in thousand <i>desjatyny</i>)	19,751	9,371	10,380
Grain output (in million <i>puds</i>)	1,186	498	688
Consumption of seed	158	75	83
Grain export	343	259	84
Remaining grain	685	164	521
Population (in thousands)	31,386	8,767	22,619
Rural population	27,355 ⁷⁴	6,951	20,404
Remaining grain per person (in <i>puds</i>)	21.8	18.7	23.0
Remaining grain per person in village	25.0	23.6	25.5
Grain export per person in village	12.5	37.3	4.1

⁷¹ *Desjatyj s'ezd RKP(b)* (Moscow, 1963), p. 422.

⁷² M. B. Gurevič, *Golod i sel'skoe hozjajstvo Ukrainy* (Xarkiv, 1923), p. 18. Kubanin, *Maxnovščina*, pp. 10–11.

⁷³ Gurevič, *Golod*, p. 20.

⁷⁴ The main reason for the decrease in population was the separation from the Ukraine of the Crimea, whose population in 1920 was 762,000. *Report on Economic Conditions in Russia: The Famine of 1921–22* (Nancy, France, 1922), p. 56.

Statistics show that in 1918 and 1919, the amount of grain produced in the steppe decreased much more than in other regions of the Ukraine. Rye produced per *desjatyna* there was 56.3 *puds* in 1915, but fell to 34.9 *puds* in 1919; in other regions of the Ukraine, however, production of rye per *desjatyna* in 1919 was 62.4 *puds*. Similarly, in 1915 spring wheat produced in the steppe region was 32.2 *puds* per *desjatyna*; in 1918 it fell to 16.0 *puds*, although other parts of the Ukraine produced 30.4 *puds* per *desjatyna* that year. Barley produced in the steppe had averaged 44.2 *puds* per *desjatyna* in 1915, but only 17.9 *puds* per *desjatyna* in 1918, when other parts of the Ukraine averaged 32.9 *puds*.⁷⁵

The decrease in acreage sown may well have been the peasants' way of protesting against the requisition. They refused to cultivate and harvest grain that would be forcibly taken away from them. In the steppe region the average farm was larger than in other regions of the Ukraine, which explains why acreage of sowed land decreased more drastically there than in other regions. In spite of the decreases in acreage sown and in yield per *desjatyna*, however, in 1920 grain requisition was more severe in the steppe than elsewhere in the Ukraine. Given such a situation, it became inevitable that the peasants would revolt and that the amount of grain produced would fall still further. From 1911 to 1915 the average annual grain output of the steppe was 454 million *puds*; in 1921, it was only 47 million *puds*—just 10 percent of the prewar output. From 1911 to 1915 the other regions of the Ukraine had an average annual output of 625 million *puds*; in 1921, that average fell to 230 million *puds*.⁷⁶ Thus, in 1921 the steppe, which had been the most productive region prior to the war, was afflicted by famine. According to the calculations of M. Gurevič,⁷⁷ in 1921 the inhabitants of the steppe had produced food sufficient only to feed themselves for four months, as table 4 shows. Areas where grain output was under 5 *puds* per inhabitant were the lands south of Starobil's'k, Kup"jans'k, Zmijiv, Lozova, Kremenčuk, Čyhyryn, and Bobryneč'.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Calculated from *Statistika Ukrainy*, ser. 2, vol. 5, no. 1: *Urožaj Ukrainy za vremja vojny i revoljucii (1915–1919 gg.)* (Xarkiv, 1924).

⁷⁶ Gurevič, *Golod*, p. 23.

⁷⁷ A statistician in the Soviet Ukraine, Gurevič had formerly been an activist in the Jewish Bund there.

⁷⁸ Gurevič, *Golod*, p. 31.

Table 4

Food Situation in the Ukraine in 1921⁷⁹

	<i>Whole Ukraine</i>	<i>The Steppe</i>	<i>Other than the Steppe</i>
Sowed land (in thousand <i>desjatyny</i>)	12,690	4,992	7,697
Grain output (in million <i>puds</i>)	276.6	46.7	229.9
Consumption of seed	91.3	26.2	65.1
Remaining grain ⁸⁰	185.3	20.5	164.8
Rural population (in thousands)	20,892 ⁷⁴	7,103	13,789
Remaining grain per person in village (in <i>puds</i>)	9.3	3.9	12.0
Months that the remaining grain suffices to support people and livestock	7.4	3.1	9.6
Months that the remaining grain suffices to support people (without livestock)	9.3	3.9	12.0

Concurrently a very severe famine was occurring in the Volga regions. Indeed, according to the Moscow government, famine conditions existed only in the Volga provinces, not in the Ukraine, at the time. A decree dated 21 July 1921 by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee acknowledged that a state of famine existed in the Middle and Lower Volga provinces, appealed to the public for help, and established a Central Famine Relief Commission (*Pomgol*) attached to the committee itself. The famine commission was headed by M. I. Kalinin, the president of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, who was aided by A. I. Rykov and L. B. Kamenev.⁸¹ This commission and the Russian government wanted the Ukrainian government and people to assist the Volga provinces and to dispatch grain from the Ukraine to the Volga. On 2 August 1921, Lenin sent a letter to the Ukrainian peasants: "The well-protected Ukraine gathered an excellent harvest this year. Workers

⁷⁹ Gurevič, *Golod*, p. 33.

⁸⁰ Assuming no exports or requisitions.

⁸¹ *Report on Economic Conditions in Russia*, p. 40.

and peasants of the starving Volga region expect help from the Ukrainian farmers.”⁸²

However difficult it may have been for Lenin to believe that a famine could occur in a land usually so rich in grain as the Ukraine, it had. The Moscow government persisted in estimating the crop at almost twice the figure accepted by local statisticians: M. Popov, chief of the Central Statistical Bureau of the Soviet government, estimated the total harvest at 580 million *puds*, against the 276 million of a statistician in the Ukraine.⁸³ At the outset, owing to delayed information from districts affected by famine in the steppe Ukraine, the Ukrainian government itself directed all relief efforts to the Volga. The steppe Ukrainians, starving themselves, were called on to supply grain to relieve the Volga region.

Between the fall of 1921 and August of 1922, a total of 1,127 trainloads of food were transferred to the Volga from the Ukraine.⁸⁴ More than 30 million *puds* were exported to the famine regions in Russia.⁸⁵ Meanwhile, in some provinces of the Ukrainian steppe the famine was at its worst, leaving many people dead in city streets and in villages. The policy of ignoring what was happening in the Ukraine and focusing all relief efforts on the Volga may not have been a deliberate one, but it certainly exacerbated the conditions of famine in southern Ukraine.

Until the fall of 1921, neither the Moscow government nor the Soviet Ukrainian government made any serious attempt to relieve the famine in the steppe Ukraine. But as the news from the districts affected by the shortage of grain became more and more disquieting, the condition of the population in the southern provinces became a topic of discussion. At the Sixth All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets, held in Xarkiv in December 1921, representatives from the southern provinces described what was happening in the steppe and appealed for help.⁸⁶

At the end of November two investigators for the American Relief Administration,⁸⁷ L. Hutchinson and F. A. Golder, went to the

⁸² Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij*, 44: 77.

⁸³ *Report on Economic Conditions in Russia*, p. 37.

⁸⁴ *Itogi bor'by s golodom v 1921–22 gg.*, p. 258.

⁸⁵ *Report on Economic Conditions in Russia*, p. 37.

⁸⁶ *Itogi bor'by s golodom v 1921–22 gg.*, p. 260.

⁸⁷ On the American Relief Administration, see Fisher, *Famine in Soviet Russia*, and B. M. Weissman, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia, 1921–1923* (Stanford, Calif., 1974). Information about southern Ukraine as an area

Ukraine. In Xarkiv they conferred with M. Skrypnyk, then commissar of internal affairs, who informed them that in the steppe Ukraine the food situation was much more serious than had been believed.⁸⁸ From officials of the Ukrainian Central Statistical Bureau in Xarkiv, the two ARA investigators got pessimistic reports about the availability of grain in the provinces of Odessa, Mykolajiv, Donec', and Zaporizžja.⁸⁹ Hutchinson was allowed to make an investigatory trip during late December and early January 1922. Travelling through southern Ukraine by car, he visited Katerynoslav, Odessa, Mykolajiv and Zaporizžja. He found "unspeakable" misery everywhere. The information provided by the statistical bureau in Xarkiv was confirmed. Hutchinson concluded that the famine conditions in southern Ukraine were as severe as those in the Volga region.⁹⁰

At about that time the Soviet Ukrainian government officially recognized the five southern provinces as famine regions. In December 1921, official statistics registered 1,158,996 starving in the five provinces. In January 1922, the number of starving was 1,895,000; in February, 2,943,095; in March, 3,248,491; and in August, 3,664,902. The total population of the five provinces was 9,699,300. Thus, according to official statistics, 40 percent of the people living in the five provinces of the steppe Ukraine were starving in August 1922.⁹¹ But according to the report of Captain Quisling,⁹² who visited the steppe at the end of February, the number stricken by the famine was much higher. On 1 March 1922, half of the population of Mykolajiv and 78 percent of those living in Zaporizžja were starving. In Zaporizžja death from starvation claimed from 30 to 40 people per day in each

needing relief came to the ARA via emigrants from the Ukraine, especially Jews. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee asked the ARA to make an investigation in the Ukraine. The committee had much data about the frightful conditions among Jewish communities in the Ukraine. Fisher, *Famine in Soviet Russia*, pp. 246-47.

⁸⁸ F. A. Golder, *On the Trail of the Russian Famine* (Stanford, Calif., 1927), pp. 119-23.

⁸⁹ Golder, *On the Trail*, p. 120; for the negotiations between the ARA and the Soviet Ukrainian government, see *ibid.*, pp. 113-21, and Weissman, *Herbert Hoover*, p. 93. In general, the ARA was very active and provided the primary assistance for those stricken by famine, as Kalinin explained. *Itogi bor'by s golodom*, pp. 4-5.

⁹⁰ American Russian Relief Administration, *Relief Bulletins*, ser. 2, vol. 22 (1922), pp. 7-13.

⁹¹ *Report on Economic Conditions*, pp. 108-109.

⁹² Captain Quisling was a member of the staff of Fridtjof Nansen, who engaged in relief work in Russia in 1921-1923. The League of Nations also employed Quisling in refugee work in Russia. Later he became a Nazi collaborator in Norway.

county; in the city of Xerson (population 20,000), an average of 42 persons died from starvation daily, and in the city of Katerynoslav (population 160,000), the number was about 80 persons daily. According to Quisling, conditions were worst in Zaporizžja, where the straw of roofs was being eaten, all dogs, cats, and crows had already been eaten, and even the leather of harnesses and wood from furniture was being consumed. Quisling also reported incidents of necrophagy and cannibalism.⁹³

According to official Soviet reports, in February the average number of calories consumed per person in Zaporizžja was 511, in Katerynoslav — 1062, and in Donec' — 1311.⁹⁴ The rates of birth and death reflected the conditions of famine: in January 1921, the city of Odessa recorded 231 births and 2,271 deaths; in April, 69 births and 3,749 deaths.⁹⁵ The report of the Ukrainian People's Commissar of Health registered 800,000 deaths from famine and related diseases in the Ukraine during the first half of 1922.⁹⁶ That was the worst period of the famine, since after the harvest of that year the situation improved, so the total number who died from famine was probably around 1 million.

A decade after the famine in the steppe Ukraine, collectivization, grain requisition, and military action would again result in famine in the Ukraine, but on a much greater scale. The situation then, however, lacked some factors that were important in the steppe Ukraine in 1921–1922, where seven years of war, revolution, civil war, and drought had made the state of agriculture extremely precarious. Nonetheless, the Soviet government in Moscow persisted in regarding the Ukraine, and especially the steppe Ukraine, as a region of abundant

⁹³ *Report on Economic Conditions*, pp. 38–39. Description of one such event has made its way into Ukrainian literature: “nače cucenjata,/za neju bihaly ta skabučaly:/xliba, xliba/I ot odnogo razu/(ne znaju, jak ce stalos' tak —/čy žal' jij serce stysnuv duže,/čy, može, tronulas' uma)/Vona ditej tyx pokolola/i stala jisty . . ./Narod zbentěžyvsja/počuvšy ce.” Myxajlo Draj-Xmara, *Poeziji* (New York, 1964), pp. 97–98.

⁹⁴ From official reports on calories consumed by workers and peasants during the civil war, it is apparent that during 1918 and 1919, workers and city dwellers were starving and peasants were eating well, but during 1920 and 1921, it was the peasants who were starving. For example, in the spring of 1918 the average number of calories consumed by a worker in Petrograd was 1,500, whereas the average consumed by a peasant in Tambov was 4,200. In the winter of 1920, however, the average number of calories consumed by a worker in Petrograd was 3,400, but in Zaporizžja it was 511. See *Sbornik statističeskix svedenij po SSSR, 1918–1923* (Moscow, 1924), pp. 122–23, 128–29, 377, 396–97.

⁹⁵ *Itogi bor'by s golodom*, p. 255.

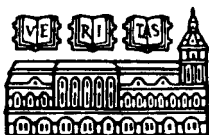
⁹⁶ *Report on Economic Conditions in Russia*, p. 55.

harvest and as a supplier of grain. By ignoring the real situation there, and by forcibly imposing harsh food requisition quotas on people who were themselves starving, the Soviet government bears much of the responsibility for the famine that took a million lives in the steppe Ukraine in 1921–1922.

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