

Impact of the Great Famine and collectivization on the Ukrainian society in the beginning of the WWII.

The years 1939–40 were a period of sharp deterioration of the standard of living in connection with economic difficulties caused by the USSR's entry into the Second World War (shortage of goods, lack of foodstuffs, queuing, and the like) and the “new-old” agrarian policies of the Soviet authorities. The introduction of “draconian laws” with regard to strengthening discipline and the extremes of the “second wave of collectivization” deepened the abyss between the Stalin administration and Ukrainian society even further. As these policies continued to drive down the standard of living, a *déjà vu* effect set in. Since memory of the Holodomor of 1932–33 was still quite fresh in social consciousness, and the shock it caused had not yet been overcome, the specter of another Great Famine made its appearance in Ukraine.

It is telling that the Stalin regime's next offensive against the peasantry during the “second wave” of collectivization in 1939 led the dissatisfied masses to draw direct parallels with the recent past and reminded many of the painfully familiar practice of forced collectivization. In general, reports about the new laws on agriculture caused some military servicemen to recall their tragic memories and feelings of 1932–33, years directly associated with the anti-peasant policies of Soviet rule. At a political meeting, the soldier Oleinikov (Leningrad military district) asked (ескд) the political commissar in agitation, “Can it be that no member of the government was aware that in Ukraine everything was taken from the peasants to the last grain, people were dying of hunger, and corpses lay about on the roads? I am certain that they knew of it but took no countermeasures.” Similar thoughts were expressed by the soldier Nosko from another unit of the same military district: “In 1933 there was hunger and poverty; people were dying of hunger, but the leadership was indifferent and took no action.” During the military campaigns of 1939–40, when the Red Army penetrated beyond the “Iron Curtain,” peasant soldiers tried to explain certain developments that made no sense to them on the basis of their own bitter experience. For example, during the Soviet-Polish war, some servicemen said in so many words that if the westerners had known of the famine and collective farms in the USSR, they would not have greeted the Red Army so joyfully. During the Soviet-Finnish war, by contrast, soldiers expressed certainty that the Finns were resisting the Red Army so stubbornly because they were very well aware of the suffering of peasants in the USSR as a result of collectivization.

In studying the attitudes of the Soviet Ukrainian population in the late 1930s and early 1940s, one can hardly overlook the fact that such concepts as “Soviet rule,” “collective farms,” “collective-farm life,” “a life of starvation,” and “famine” came to be regarded by a significant part of the population as somewhat synonymous and directly related with regard to cause and effect.

It may be said *ex post facto* that the human factor—the disloyalty of a considerable portion of the Ukrainian population to Stalin's rule—was not the least important of the factors that brought about the catastrophe of 1941.

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