



DEBATE PACK

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Ukrainian Holodomor

Westminster Hall
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Debate initiated by Pauline Latham

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1. Background

During the Stalin era in the 1930s, and particularly over the winter of 1932-3, the confiscation of crops in pursuit of the forced collectivisation of agriculture is widely accepted to have led to the death of millions in the Soviet Union, mainly Ukrainian peasant farmers, of whom about seven million died. The famine was largely man-made, although the episode remains controversial. It was accompanied by a wide-ranging purge of the Ukrainian intelligentsia and of the Ukrainian Communist Party.

The Australian Senate [recognised](#) it as genocide in 2003, as have a number of European countries. The European Parliament [recognised](#) the Holodomor as a crime against humanity in 2008. The Russian government denies that it was aimed at a particular ethnicity, and says that this means it was not an act of genocide.

In 2006 (under the West-leaning Viktor Yushchenko) the government of Ukraine passed a law recognising the disaster as genocide against the Ukrainian people. In the vote in the Ukrainian parliament, pro-western parties voted in favour of the law while Viktor Yanukovich's Party of the Regions largely abstained and the Communist Party of Ukraine voted against it.

2. Press Articles

The following is a selection of press articles relevant to this debate.

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How an atrocity that killed millions remained a secret for decades

National Post
6 October 2017
Robert Fulford

Millions of Ukrainian peasants starved to death under brutal famine imposed by Joseph Stalin

Daily Telegraph Australia
19 February 2017
Marea Donnelly

It's long past time to identify and shame Holodomor deniers

Ukrainian Weekly
9 December 2016

Ukraine Calls For Holodomor Famine To Be Recognized As 'Genocide'

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
26 November 2016

Holodomor: Memories of Ukraine's silent massacre

BBC News
23 November 2013

Ukraine's forgotten famine

The Guardian
18 November 2009
James Marson

Holodomor: The Secret Holocaust in Ukraine

The New American
5 February 2009
James Perloff

Equating Holodomor With Genocide

Moscow Times (Way Back internet archive)
24 April 2008
Georgy Bovt

3. PQs

Business of the House **28 Nov 2013 | 571 c421**

Asked by: Simon Danczuk

Last week people in Rochdale commemorated the Holodomor famine that occurred in Ukraine, killing 7 million people in one of the most horrifying episodes in European history. Does the Leader of the House agree that it would be fitting on this 80th anniversary to debate recognition of the Holodomor as genocide?

Answering member: Andrew Lansley

The hon. Gentleman and the House will know that the Holodomor was an horrific man-made disaster of unimaginable scale. We recognise the appalling human tragedy that occurred and its importance in the history of Ukraine and Europe. The Government pay tribute to the people who continue to work to keep alive the memory of all those who perished in the Holodomor. There is a complex debate about this, as the hon. Gentleman will recall. For an explanation of that, I would, if I may, direct Members to the speech by my

Ukraine **19 June 2013 | 564 cc733-4W**

Asked by: Pauline Latham

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to work with the International Court of Justice to recognise the Ukrainian holodomor as genocide.

Answering member: David Lidington | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

As I said during a Westminster Hall debate on 11 June 2013, Official Report, columns 25-30WH, Government policy is that recognition of genocides should be a matter for judicial decision and so it should be for judges, rather than Governments or non-judicial bodies, to make a designation of genocide. Such decisions should be based on a credible judicial process, and the courts are best placed to judge what are essentially criminal matters.

The British Government will not forget or overlook what happened, and we will continue to demonstrate our solidarity with the people of Ukraine in remembering this tragedy.

Ukraine: Famine **22 Feb 2010 | 317564**

Asked by: Daniel Kawczynski

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs with reference to the answer to the hon. Member for Bolton South East of 6 October 2008, Official Report, column 234W, on Ukraine: human rights, what the policy of the Government is on the recognition as

genocide of events which led to the Holodomor famine in Ukraine in 1932-33; and if he will make a statement.

Answering member: Chris Bryant | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The Holodomor was an appalling, man-made human tragedy and the UK fully recognises its importance in Ukraine's history. The UK has co-operated with Ukraine to promote remembrance and increase public awareness of the Holodomor. We have supported statements at the UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe honouring the memory of those who perished in the Holodomor and encouraging the promotion of its remembrance. In 2008, His Royal Highness The Duke of York, Her Royal Highness Princess Eugenie of York, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and my hon. Friend Caroline Flint, the then Minister for Europe all paid their respects to those who suffered so terribly in 1932-33 by laying wreaths at the Holodomor memorial in Kyiv. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was represented at the events to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Holodomor held in Kyiv on 22 November 2008, and the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary sent written messages of condolence to mark this important occasion. The UK was also represented at the 75th anniversary memorial event in London. With regard to the question of whether the events of 1932-33 should be recognised as genocide, the UK does not judge that the evidence is sufficiently unequivocal to categorise the Holodomor as genocide as defined by the 1948 UN Convention on Genocide. However, we do recognise that there is a division of opinion among academics on this matter and we will continue to follow the debate closely, particularly in the light of any further emerging evidence.

Ukraine: Human Rights
06 Oct 2008 | 480 c234W

Asked by: Brian Iddon

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to (a) promote the remembrance and (b) increase public awareness of the 1932-33 Holodomor in Ukraine, as agreed during President Yushchenko's visit on 15 May 2008.

Answering member: Jim Murphy | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The Famine of 1932-33 in Ukraine was an appalling man-made human tragedy. The Government fully recognise their importance in Ukraine's history. In August this year, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary laid a wreath at the Famine memorial in Kiev. In November 2007, the UK supported a resolution at the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation and a joint statement at the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe honouring the memory of those who perished in the Famine and encouraging the promotion of its remembrance. The Ukrainian Government plan a ceremony to commemorate the 75th anniversary later this year. The UK will support this and other appropriate acts of remembrance. We will continue to seek further ways in which we can promote remembrance and public awareness of the Famine, as agreed during President Yushchenko's visit to the UK.

4. Other Parliamentary material

4.1 Debates

UK Relations with Ukraine [Extract]
10 Dec 2013 | 572 c61WH

[...]

Jason McCartney: There is a vibrant Ukrainian community in Huddersfield, next to my constituency. I look forward to celebrating Ukrainian Christmas with them yet again in the first weekend of January. Recently, we have been campaigning for recognition of the Holodomor as a genocide. Does my hon. Friend agree that we must continue to urge the Foreign Office to do everything that it can to stop the immediate violence and find a long-term solution? So many Ukrainians in the United Kingdom are deeply concerned about the situation there at the moment.

John Whittingdale: I agree entirely. That is demonstrated by the large number of Ukrainians who have come to listen to this debate.

I hope that the Ukrainian Government will stand by their assurance and assertion that they still see their future in closer relations with Europe. It is for the Ukrainian people to decide their future, but that is what the Government say. Particularly given what has happened and the bravery being shown by the Ukrainian people, now is the time when we must support them. We must not turn our back on them.

Pauline Latham: I am pleased to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Havard; thank you for allowing me to speak. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale) for allowing me to take part in this important debate and for securing it.

Some Members may know that I have tried to raise awareness of the Ukrainian Holodomor and spoken on several occasions on behalf of the Ukrainian people in this country, who also asked me to speak in this debate. Given my friendship with the local community, it goes without saying that I was shocked by the unfolding of the current social and political situation in Ukraine. Like many others, I was optimistic when it was announced that the Yanukovich Administration was to sign the association and deep and comprehensive free trade agreements with the EU.

[...]

Ukrainian Holodomor [Extract]
11 Jun 2013 | 564 cc25-7WH

Pauline Latham: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Mrs Riordan. Interestingly, this debate follows one about the first world war. The Minister came into the Chamber just after what was said about how we remember our past and how that is very important for our future.

The purpose of the debate is to call on the United Kingdom Government officially to recognise a dreadful and tragic part of Ukraine's history as genocide. I have met the Ukrainian community in Derby, who are still distressed that we have never recognised the Ukrainian holodomor as genocide, even though other countries have, including some in the Commonwealth.

The Ukrainian holodomor refers most specifically to the brutal, artificial famine imposed on the Ukrainian people in 1932 and 1933 by Stalin's regime. In its broadest sense, the holodomor refers to the Ukrainian genocide that began in 1929 with massive waves of deadly deportations of Ukraine's prospering farmers, as well as the deportation and execution of its religious, academic and cultural leaders, which culminated in the devastating forced famine that killed millions of innocent men, women and children. Between 1932 and 1933, a man-made famine raged through Ukraine and Kuban, resulting in the deaths of between 7 million and 12 million people, mainly Ukrainians, and it was instigated by the Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin.

There are of course deniers of the holodomor, as there are those who deny the existence of the holocaust. In fact, there is a division of opinion in Ukraine on the number who died—from 2 million or 3 million up to 12 million—but they agree that it was a man-made famine directed at Ukrainians in Ukraine and Kuban, and that it meets the criteria for the definition of genocide in the 1948 UN convention. It is hardly surprising that there is some confusion about the holodomor, because it is poorly documented, the records were manipulated and those who conducted the census were executed.

The main goal of the artificial famine was to break the spirit of Ukrainian farmers and force them into collectivism. It was used as an effective tool to break the resistance of Ukrainian culture. Moscow perceived it as a threat to Russo-centric Soviet rule, and therefore acted brutally and sadistically to crush cultural resistance. The goal of the artificial famine was to ethnically cleanse Ukrainians from vast areas.

In 1932, Stalin increased the basic grain procurement quota for Ukraine by 44%, knowing that such an extraordinarily high quota would result in a grain shortage and the inability of Ukrainian peasants to feed themselves. Such a goal would not have been achievable had the communists not already ruined the nation's productivity by eliminating the best farmers.

That year, not a single village was able to meet the impossible quota, which far exceeded Ukraine's best output in previous years. Soviet law was quite clear that no grain could be given to feed the peasants until

the quota was met. Stalin then issued one of the cruellest orders of his career: if quotas were not met, all grain was to be confiscated. As one Soviet author wrote much later:

“All the grain without exception was requisitioned for the fulfilment of the Plan, including that set aside for sowing, fodder, and even that previously issued to the kolkhozniki”—

the collectivised peasants—

“as payment for their work.”

The authorisation included seizure of all food from all households, and any home that did not turn over all its grain was accused of hoarding state property.

With the aid of military troops, USSR Government secret police and the USSR law enforcement agency, Communist party officials moved against peasants who might have been hiding grain from the Soviet Government. Of course, to try to avoid starvation, nearly every family attempted to conceal food, as we would expect: if people’s children were dying, they would not want to let their children die, never mind themselves. Experience soon made the brigades proficient at detecting even the cleverest hiding places. The result was mass starvation that took millions of lives during the terrible winter of 1932-33. Food was nearly impossible to find anywhere. Unable to get food, many ate whatever passed for it—weeds, leaves, tree bark and insects; some were lucky enough to be able to live on small woodland animals.

In August 1932, the Communist party of the USSR passed a law mandating the death penalty for theft of social property. Watchtowers were built and were manned by trigger-happy young communists. Thousands of peasants were shot for attempting to take a handful of grain or a few beets from the kolkhozes to feed their starving families.

To put that into perspective, at the height of the genocide, Ukrainians died at a rate of 25,000 per day, and nearly one in four rural Ukrainians perished as a direct result. At the same time, the Soviet Union dumped 1.7 million tons of grain on western markets. Nearly a fifth of a ton of grain was exported for each person who died of starvation, and more than 3 million children born in 1932 and 1933 died of starvation.

Many peasants attempted to reach Ukraine’s cities, such as Kiev, where factory workers were still allowed a little pay and food. However, in December 1932, the communists introduced internal passports. That made it impossible for a villager to get a city job without the party’s permission, which was almost universally denied. The internal passport system was implemented to restrict the movements of Ukrainian peasants so that they could not travel in search of food. Ukrainian grain was collected and stored in grain elevators guarded by military and secret police units, while Ukrainians starved in the immediate area. That Moscow-instigated action was a deliberate act of genocide against the Ukrainian peasants.

Peasants hoped to get to Poland, Romania or even Russia, where there was no famine, but emigration was strictly forbidden. Ukrainian train stations were swamped with the starving who hoped to sneak aboard a train or to beg in the hope that a passenger on a passing train might throw them a bread crust. They were repelled by guards, who found themselves faced with the problem of removing the countless corpses of those who had starved and which littered the stations.

As I said, at the famine's height, 25,000 people died per day. As the winter of 1932-33 wore on, Ukraine became a panorama of horror. The roadsides were filled with the corpses of those who had died seeking food. The bodies, many of which snow concealed until the spring thaw, were unceremoniously dumped into mass graves by the communists. Many others died of starvation in their homes, with some choosing to end the process by suicide, commonly by hanging—if they had the strength to do it. One American correspondent reported:

“The bodies of some were reduced to skeletons, with their skin hanging grayish-yellow and loose over their bones. Their faces looked like rubber masks with large, bulging, immobile eyes. Their necks seemed to have shrunk onto their shoulders. The look in their eyes was glassy, heralding their approaching death.”

The worst paradox is that much of the confiscated grain was exported to the west, and large portions were simply dumped in the sea or allowed to rot by the Soviets. For example, a huge supply of grain lay decaying under guard at a station in Poltava province. Passing it in a train, an American correspondent saw

“huge pyramids of grain, piled high, and smoking from internal combustion.”

In the Lubotino region, thousands of tons of confiscated potatoes were allowed to rot, surrounded by barbed wire.

News of this act of brutality was got out to the west, including to Germany in observations from its consulate in Kharkiv, and to Britain by various journalists, such as Gareth Jones—I have just heard that a book about him is to be published imminently—and Malcolm Muggeridge, who never forgot what he saw. In Canada and the United States, the Ukrainian community explained what was happening.

The genocide continued for several years with further destruction of Ukraine's political leadership, resettlement of its depopulated areas with other ethnic groups, blatant public denial of famine and prosecution of those who dared to speak of it publicly. It was the official policy of the Soviet Union to deny the existence of a famine and therefore to refuse any outside assistance. Anyone claiming that there was in fact a famine was accused of spreading anti-Soviet propaganda. Inside the Soviet Union, a person could be arrested for even using the words “famine”, “hunger” or “starvation” in a sentence.

The holodomor was kept out of official history until 1991, when Ukraine—a country of 47 million people—finally won its independence. As James Perloff wrote:

“The Holodomor stands as a permanent warning of what happens when unlimited state power destroys God-given rights. A cursory review of America’s Bill of Rights demonstrates that virtually every right mentioned was trampled on by Stalin in Ukraine. Yet although the dictator used every means to eradicate the people’s will, the national spirit lived on unbreakably, until Ukraine gained its independence.”

[...]

4.2 Early Day Motions

75th anniversary of the Holodomor in Ukraine

EDM 1693 (session 2007-08)

4 June 2008

Marsha Singh

That this House notes that the British Association of Ukrainians is commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Holodomor in Ukraine; further notes that the Holodomor was the systematic starvation to death of at least 7,000,000 Ukrainians during 1932 and 1933 when the Soviet regime confiscated all food from Ukrainian villages; considers that this was an appalling act of inhumanity and an immense tragedy; further notes that this anniversary honours the memory of all the millions who died; and calls on the Government to officially recognise the Holodomor as an act of genocide.

5. Further reading

International Commission of Inquiry into the 1932-33 famine in Ukraine: the final report 1990, International Commission of Inquiry into the 1932-33 Famine in Ukraine, 1990

Joint statement by the delegations of Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Egypt, Georgia, Guatemala, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Nauru, Pakistan, Qatar, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates and the United States of America on the seventieth anniversary of the Great Famine of 1932-1933 in Ukraine (Holodomor), United Nations, 7 November 2003

HOLODOMOR : The famine-genocide of Ukraine, 1932-1933.
website

Holodomor Recognition, Ukrainian World Congress website

Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group webpage on the Holodomor, Human Rights in Ukraine

Robert Conquest, *Harvest of sorrow*, 1986
(*Available from the Members Library)

Aegis Trust (website)

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Ukraine

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Genocide Prevention and Crimes Against Humanity

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