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FAMINE IN KALMYKIA (1932–1933)

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Abstract

The declared theme of the famine in 1932–1933 is especially relevant today in the contemporary world historiography of modern times. The focus of attention is the theme of the famine disaster that took place in the grain-growing areas of the Volga region, the North Caucasus, the Don and the Kuban, as well as in Ukraine and Kazakhstan, which in the early 1930s found themselves in the zone of massive collectivization. For a long time, this topic was a taboo, both for researchers and for those who are interested in the historical past of the Russian state. This topic remains politicized and very sensitive at the present time. The novelty of the declared work lies in the wide use of rare archival sources. Scientists have yet to conduct specific studies to give a real and complete picture of the scale and consequences of the famine in Russia, the responsibility for which lies with the Soviet leadership. The famine of 1932–1933 in the USSR is one of the greatest humanitarian disasters of the Soviet period. In contrast to the famine of 1921–1922 it was caused not so much by drought and poor harvest as by the anti-peasant bread and meat procurement and tax policies of the Soviet leadership. The historical truth will make it possible to preserve the spiritual and moral values that developed during the development of the USSR as the basis for the prosperity of the Russian state in the 21st century.

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1. Introduction

Hunger is one of the most dramatic chapters in the history of Russia. In the winter of 1932–1933 in the Ukraine, the Don and the North Caucasus, in the Lower and Middle Volga regions, in the South Urals and in Kazakhstan, a mass famine broke out. Even according to the diminished Stalin's data, up to 30 million people were starving, and in fact they were at least 50 million, that is, almost a third of the population of the USSR. Nevertheless, the Soviet leadership did not take decisive measures to eliminate the famine disaster. Moreover, as historians have noted, the district party leadership often determined how much grain the collective farmers had to hand over to the state, and how much to keep for their own needs. Based on the plan established by the party organs, the peasant had to give away the entire harvest completely. This continued the pumping of grain from the countryside, while millions of people were dying of hunger. The analysis of the state of the problems under consideration in the post-Soviet period is characterized by studies within the framework of general problems of the Soviet period (Maksimov, 2002; Ubushaev, 2005). The largest achievement of foreign historiography in the XXI century were publications investigating and assessing the period of collectivization, the famine of 1932–1933, which largely coincided with the opinion of Russian scientists (Grazios, 2008; Fitzpatrick, 2001; Shapoval, 2003; Shapoval, 2006, etc.). Thus, in the Russian historiography, there are practically no special studies on the problems of the famine disaster in Kalmykia during the Soviet period (1932–1933).

2. Problem Statement

The most significant problem is the study of the regional characteristics of the Holodomor, given the enormous human losses during the famine in the period under study.

3. Research Questions

The object of the study is the rural population of Kalmyk uluses under the conditions of the famine of 1932–1933. The subject of the research is the processes occurring in the economic sphere of the life of the peasant population of Kalmykia in the 1st half of the 1930s:

1. factors of hunger in rural areas of Kalmykia;
2. food supply system for the rural population;
3. the scale of the tragedy in the regional context;
4. the impact of hunger on the socio-economic development of the region.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to identify and comprehensively describe the main causes and consequences of the famine in the early 1930s on the basis of new archival documents and oral histories in Kalmykia.

5. Research Methods

The principles of historical research are used, such as objectivity and historicism, critical approach to the use of oral sources, concrete historical approach to the study of the topic. The main ones are historical-genetic, chronological and narrative methods.

6. Findings

One of the most significant prerequisites for the Soviet Holodomor was the forced collectivization carried out in the late 1920s – 1937. The Center ignored the petitions of the regional authorities to reduce the grain procurement plans. The village was being ruined. E.g., if in 1928 26 % of the grain crop was withdrawn, then in 1932 this figure was 44.3 %. Therefore, in the spring of 1932 in a number of areas of the Lower Volga region, including Kalmykia, a mass famine began, which engulfed almost the entire country. Since the famine in the Lower Volga region began in 1932, the secretary of the regional committee of the CPSU (b) V.V. Ptukha already in December 1932 asked the higher authorities to increase the grain supply plan for January 1933 by 1.9 thousand tons, but his request was rejected. It was decided to supply the Lower Volga region with 1 thousand tons of bread in advance "against deductions for local needs from the purchase of bread, which will be made after the fulfillment of the full annual grain procurement plan for the Lower Volga region" (Ivnitskii, 2009, p. 225). The transition to complete collectivization in a short time already in the early 1930s led to the emergence of fictitious or created by violent means collective farms. At the same time, the peasants often resisted silently, but massively slaughtered livestock, rotted seeds, and all this led to the disorganization of agricultural production.

The next reason for the famine disaster was the mass dispossession of the bulk of the hardworking, diligent peasants. In many villages they were massively dispossessed, in some areas from 80 to 90 % of the peasants were repressed. The size of food loans allocated to starving Kalmykia was negligible. It is very difficult to establish the exact numbers of the starving population, since always (not only in this case) the border between the hungry and the simply undernourished remains unclear. In addition, the picture of the famine of 1932–1933 was very mozaic. Next to the village, which did not fulfill the procurement plan and was severely starving, there could be a village that was less hungry or even not starving, but overwintered, as they say, from hand to mouth.

The fact that grain was taken from the collective farms for the needs of industrialization cannot justify neither violence in the course of the creation of collective farms, nor, even more so, hunger. The famine of 1932–1933 cannot be assessed otherwise than as the most serious crime of the Stalinist leadership against the Soviet people. The complete withdrawal of grain products, the deprivation of even the seed fund, the failure to pay workdays caused massive discontent among the peasants. In the report of the head of the Kalmyk department of the OGPU Kishkin, on the example of only one collective farm "Volodarovskii" in March 1933, it was noted that "every day at the board of the collective farm there are crowds of women with children who insistently demand bread. An example is the family of F. Kuzmenko, a carpenter of the collective farm, who is starving with his family. The whole family of a collective farmer E. Vasilenko is starving, her legs are swollen from hunger, one child has died. The children of the carpenter Osadchy are on the verge of swelling. A teenage orphan Germashev A., driven

out by his aunt, goes to the board every day with a request for bread and is on the verge of swelling. There are many similar cases. Many collective farmers prepare flat bread from mustard, soaking its bitterness. In Elista, there are many cases of starvation, swelling, eating gophers, and various substitutes. Jellied meat made from boiled leather is sold quite legally at the bazaar. In some cases, the soaked and boiled skin is cut into pieces and eaten. All of the above circumstances often cause an increase in anti-Soviet protests and exacerbate the political mood of the population." Among the teachers of Elista, there were also cases of dissatisfaction not only with the difficult financial situation, but also with the authorities. The teacher of school № 2 Bochkareva G. said: "To hell with the teacher's work. It does not satisfy us materially. I will quit school. They give little bread, you can't live with it". The teacher Z. Kardonova, who was present at the same time, noted: "I would be very glad to completely break free from the USSR to Poland, I have relatives there (the former noblemen Chernilovskys), this is where I could live in my own pleasure." Similar sentiments were noted among the peasants in the village Bisliurt of the Central ulus. Butenko O.: "16 years have passed since the revolution, and they all talk about the elimination of kulaks, they have long been gone, all have become farm laborers". He was supported by Lenkov L.: "The workers employed in the mines live unenviably, and those workers who have many dependents are starving, their earnings are not enough for them" (NA RK. F. P-1. Op. 2. D. 105. L. 41, p. 143). The agents of the NKVD and the OGPU did not even have time to record and prosecute those responsible. Population dissatisfaction grew. On March 27, 1933, the leadership of the OGPU informed the regional committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks and the regional executive committee that "the size of food difficulties is becoming ever larger. Deaths from hunger and swelling from malnutrition are on the rise. Such facts occur almost everywhere, that along with this, according to our data, in the city of Elista (in the Volodarskii collective farm) there is also a food crisis... Cattle are moving from the Black Lands to the plots of the collective farm, and the shepherds' stocks of grain and food are coming to an end, the collective farm has nothing to supply them with in the future" ((NA RK. F. P-1. Op. 2. D. 105. L. 41, pp. 143–144). According to agents of the NKVD, it was noted that the state and party leader, writer of Kalmykia A. Amur-Sanan wrote to his friend A. Chapchaev in Urga (Mongolia) in September 1933 about a severe raging famine in the USSR and Kalmykia. Amur-Sanan noted that he "cries outright when he sees the laborers and the poor starving." The peasant T. Churkin (in connection with the murder of S.M. Kirov), lamenting, expressed himself as follows: "It is a pity that they did not kill Stalin, the bloodsucker of the peasant, he tortured the whole people with his decrees, sends tax after tax, ruined the peasantry. Soon we will all die of hunger" (NA RK. F. P-1. Op. 2. D. 150. L. 129, 154).

The grave situation was observed in the Mandzhikinskiy, Ikiburulskiy and Kebyutovskiy village councils of the Central ulus, where residents were experiencing "acute food difficulties." There were cases of hunger deaths – 66 people, peasants, overcame by hunger – 303 people, starving people – 1005 people. In the boarding school of the Kebyutovsky village council, 8 starving children are on the verge of death, one of them has already died, as the OGPU reported to the Soviet-party leadership. There have been numerous cases of individual farmers and collective farmers slaughtering dairy cows for food (NA RK. F. P-1. Op. 2. D. 104. L. 64).

The local leadership saw the reasons for the famine in this ulus in the poor organizational work of village councils and collective farm chairmen. They were brought to trial and sentenced to imprisonment.

A similar picture was observed in the village Yandyki of Primorskii ulus. The poor woman V. Kurasova said that she "is not going to give seeds to the collective farm, put me in prison, send me to the kulaks colony, I am still not giving my last bread." Her words were supported by many fellow villagers.

Thousands of starving peasants, like in the Ukraine and the North Caucasus, went in search of a piece of bread to other parts of the country. Attempts by the hungry to find salvation in more prosperous areas and cities, as in the previous winter, were unsuccessful. They either stumbled upon the cordons, or were ruthlessly fished out and returned to where hunger reigned. Due to the circumstances, on February 16, 1933, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) adopted a resolution to extend to the Lower Volga Territory the directive of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR dated January 22, 1933 on the prohibition of unauthorized departure from the borders of their region, arresting migrants and their forced return to their old places of residence (Danilov & Kondrashin, 1999). By February 13, according to the OGPU, about 11 thousand people were detained in the Lower Volga region, almost 10 thousand of them were returned back (i.e. 90 %) (Danilov & Kondrashin, 1999). The scale of the famine was great and its consequences in the uluses of Kalmykia were tragic. In a survey of eyewitnesses to the famine, out of 225 interviewed witnesses, 125 had close relatives who died of starvation during the famine disaster. For example, in the family of Tsagan Alkaevna Mangutova, a resident of the 20 Let Oktyabria collective farm of the Karavaninskii village council of Dolbanskii ulus, four family members died of hunger. A similar tragedy occurred in the family of the peasant Davaev Uliumdzhi Ochirovich from the collective farm named after Kanukov, of Sarpinsky ulus.

We found that in 1931-1933 cases of cannibalism and corpse-eating did not occur in the villages and collective farms of Kalmykia. But, according to an eyewitness to the famine, P.I. Manzhikova. (Western ulus of Byudermes-Kebuitovsky agricultural farm Ziungar Kebiut), the villagers had to dig up the corpses of animals doused with creolin in cattle burial grounds, wash them with water and cook soups (budan). They said about such meat: "I ate the meat that God gave!" The definition that they ate meat, given by the hungry year of 1933, would be more appropriate.

Here is just one testimony from hundreds of others, recorded in the course of a sociological survey of Kalmyk villages, about the famine of 1932-1933 in Kalmykia. From the memoirs of a resident of stanitsa Grabbevskaia Alekseeva Praskovia Erdnievna (born 1924):

"Our family, my mother and two sisters, miraculously survived the famine year. In 1929, we, the family of a rural teacher, were dispossessed. All property and households were requisitioned. The father was exiled to the Urals. Residents of stanitsa Grabbevskaia were relocated to the new Kalmyk region of the Salskii district of the North Caucasian region. We, a sick grandmother, mother and sister, were taken by carriage to a new village and unloaded on the street near the house nearest to the road. We settled in an abandoned and not heated small dugout. It was very cold. My sister and I hid in one sheepskin coat for two, preserved from our father. Soon my mother died of hunger. I remember walking in search of food and went into the house where the furrier was working. He carried sheep skins and threw the trimmings into the bucket. I discreetly picked them and ate them right there. Often, we had to eat various substitutes: the meat of dead animals and birds, which we dried and boiled. Whole families died. The carters took them somewhere for burial, the Kalmyks did not have a cemetery as such at that time".

The scale and geography of the famine were captured in the reports of the chiefs of political departments and employees of the OGPU. Here are the most striking of them, reproducing in detail the situation in specific settlements of the Volga region, the North Caucasus and Kalmykia during the famine in 1932–1933.

From the secret information of the plenipotentiary representative for the Lower Volga region of the Kalmyk regional department of the OGPU Poletaev dated March 25, 1932 about the famine in Kalmykia:

“In addition to our reports of food shortages in the region, the food shortage situation remains tense to date, especially in the Western ulus. Due to the lack of food, unorganized migration of collective farmers continues to be observed, and the lack of bread causes swelling of individual family members among the peasants. 18 families of collective farmers left the Biudermes-Kebiutov collective farm without permission. In the Abganerovskii aimag, the collective farmer G. Koplukhov is starving, got swollen and cannot even get up. In the khoton of Kerdat, the village council watchman B. Ilzhenko is swollen because of hunger "(NA RK. F. P-1. Op. 2. D. 104. L. 204).

The famine 1932-1933 became a disaster not only for the countryside, but for the country as a whole. The scale of the tragedy can be judged by the following data. One of the first to determine the number of victims of hunger was Tsaplin (1990), who relied on the statistics of the registry office. In his opinion, the population of the USSR from the fall of 1932 to April 1933 decreased from 165.7 million people to 158 million, or by 7.7 million, mainly due to the rural population (Tsaplin, 1990). In 1932–1933 on average 4 million people were dying annually. This allows us to say that in 1932–1933 at least 2.8 million people. (1.4 million people annually) died of hunger and its consequences with registration in the registry office. Summing up this figure with the number of unregistered deaths (1 million people), he received 3.8 million victims of famine and its consequences (Tsaplin, 1990).

Foreign and domestic scholars have accumulated a lot of data on the famine of 1932–1933. Among researchers, there are various estimates of the number of victims of this hunger disaster. Thus, Conquest (1988), a well-known publicist and author of one of the most authoritative books in the West about the Holodomor “The Harvest of Sorrow. Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine”, first published in 1988, tries to prove that during the famine of 1932–1933 7 million people died in the USSR. Of these, in his opinion, 5 million died in the Ukraine, 1 million people in the North Caucasus and, in “other places” – 1 million people.

The prominent Western scientist Mase (2004) considers more than 5 million peasants to be among the victims of hunger. Another group of foreign researchers, Davies and Wheatcroft (2004) determine the number of victims of famine within 4–5 million, including 3–4 million in Ukraine. Some modern Russian historians agree with their point of view: Danilov (1996), Osokina (1991) and others.

Holodomor of the 1930s in the Soviet unified information space first appeared at the end of perestroika. Today, on the post-Soviet Internet field, exists a completely opposite view of hunger as a global catastrophe of the 20th century.

On April 2, 2008, the State Duma of the Russian Federation in an official statement "In memory of the victims of the famine of the 30s on the territory of the USSR" decisively stated that it condemns the regime that neglected people's lives in order to achieve economic and political goals and declare the

unacceptability of any attempts to revive in the states, which were formerly part of the USSR, totalitarian regimes that neglect the rights and lives of their citizens (Resolution, 2008).

The problem of establishing the exact number of victims of the famine of 1932–1933 in the USSR it needs further deep and comprehensive investigation. According to Kondrashin (2008), there were (about 1.5 million victims of hunger in the Volga region, the South Urals, Don and Kuban. In general, at least 2.5 million people died of hunger in the RSFSR without Kazakhstan.

Recognized specialist in the history of the peasantry, Ivnikskii (2009), believes that during the famine Ukraine, the North Caucasus, Kazakhstan and the Volga region were particularly affected. The total losses from hunger in the USSR amount to at least 7 million people.

Currently there is a sufficient number of estimates of the losses from hunger in Ukraine (S. Kulchitskii, P. Vasilevskii, etc.). Thus, the well-known Ukrainian scientist Kulchitskii (1991), relying on the restoration of natural population growth in 1933 and 1934 and determining the population deficit at the beginning of 1933 according to the 1937 census, considers human losses from hunger to be 3.5 million people.

Since there is no information about the victims of famine after April 15, 1933, the economist P.K. Vasilevskii proposed a calculation method based on the materials of the OGPU covering the period from December 1, 1932 to April 15, 1933. He calculated the missing information by determining the average monthly mortality for the recorded period, and then for the remaining 3.5 months in the unregistered territory. Multiplying the resulting number by the death rate in the unaccounted territory (in the opinion of the author, equal to 2.5) and summing up the results, he received 7.1 million people human losses from hunger. However, in the proposed method, the reliability of the main data source, as well as the chosen mortality rate, is poorly substantiated (Aralovets, 1995).

Thus, the destruction by collectivization, dispossession and "price scissors" of the traditional system of peasants' survival during the famine period led to a significant increase in the mortality rate of the population.

7. Conclusion

Modernization measures in agriculture, aimed at changing the country's economy as a whole, did not provide for the famine of the peasants. The vast majority of government supplies were aimed at industrializing the country and modernizing the army. Industrialization was aimed at strengthening the power of the country through the creation of heavy industry. The powerful changes in Soviet society concerned exclusively the working class, and the peasantry here remained in secondary roles. The scale of the famine that struck our country in 1933 was tragic in every respect. Such an outcome was natural, since forced collectivization destroyed the traditional for the peasant forms of farming. It was difficult for the Kalmyk peasant-cattle breeder to adapt, to master land cultivation.

The results obtained can be used as additional materials for thematic seminars and lectures on the study of the Holodomor of 1932–1933. In the course of further work on this topic, it is possible to use this study as the base for a more detailed research monograph using all sources available to historians.

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