

Total Wars and the Making of Modern Ukraine, 1914–1954

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From Famine to the Holodomor, 1932–1933

Many of the party secretaries responsible for implementing the grain collection plans in Ukraine cautiously warned Moscow of its impossible quotas. They understood that the mass protests and demonstrations they encountered represented only a small tip of the iceberg of mass discontent and anger in the countryside.¹¹⁵ Ukrainian party officials warned Stalin that the harvest of 1932 would produce less than in 1931 and that the famine would intensify in the fall. In their letters to Stalin and Molotov, dated 10 June 1932, high-ranking Ukrainian party leaders Hryhory Petrovsky and Vlas Chubar asked for 1.5 million to 2 million poods of grain to supply the starving Ukrainian countryside.¹¹⁶

Although the 1932 harvest did produce less than the poor harvest of 1931, Stalin did not relent.¹¹⁷ By the early summer of 1932, he resolved that “only a policy of uncompromising harshness would enable the grain collections to succeed.”¹¹⁸ On 15 June, he asserted, “Ukraine has been given more than it should get. There is no reason to give it more grain – and there is nowhere to take it from.”¹¹⁹ Although he admitted the existence of “impoverishment and famine” in a number of fertile Ukrainian districts, he did not view it as an emergency.¹²⁰ Three days later, in a letter to Lazar Kaganovich and Molotov, he demanded that “we should add an extra 4–5 percent to the plan in order to cover inevitable errors in the records and fulfill the plan at any cost.”¹²¹

In late June 1932, Stalin and Molotov sent a telegram to the Communist Party of Ukraine and to the Soviet Ukrainian government, stressing the necessity to complete the assigned grain deliveries by all means necessary.¹²² At the Third All-Ukrainian Conference of the Communist Party

of Ukraine (6–9 July 1932), Molotov and Kaganovich, Stalin's primary troubleshooters, forced members of the reluctant CP(b)U Politburo to agree to fulfil the centrally assigned agricultural plan without any compromises or delays.¹²³ As Stalin and his closest allies well understood at this point in time, the extreme grain requisitions would spark not just an accidental famine, but an intentional one, the Holodomor.¹²⁴

In response to peasant resistance, Stalin insisted on the promulgation of the "Decree on the Protection of State Property" in early August. This law authorized an individual's execution and confiscation of all personal possessions if he stole property, even a few specks of grain, from a collective farm or cooperative.¹²⁵ The Politburo radically modified this decree, insisting that individuals (not kulaks) who engaged in such criminal acts should receive a sentence of only ten years imprisonment. Only those who had been kulaks or who "systematically" stole grain, sugar beet, or animals would be shot.¹²⁶

Despite the ruthless measures the authorities embraced in the late summer, the grain collections did not meet expectations. In early August, Stalin complained about the state of grain accumulation in Ukraine. In September, the republic nearly met the monthly goal imposed by Moscow, but in October and November its peasants faltered. Of all of the major grain-growing areas of the Soviet Union (which included Ukraine, the North Caucasus, the Lower Volga Region, and the Central Volga Region), the Ukrainian SSR produced less than 40 per cent of its assigned quota, the lowest of the four.¹²⁷ In the eyes of Stalin and his closest comrades, Ukraine – the USSR's breadbasket – had just become a "slacker republic." In his eyes, not only did the republic not deliver, it *refused* to deliver. In an addendum to a special OGPU report on the anti-collective farm movement in Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine, written in the late summer of 1932, the authors asserted that "Ukraine stands in first place when it comes to mass anti-Soviet incidents."¹²⁸ Stalin, who followed the progress of collectivization closely, most likely read this dispatch. If not, he independently drew the same conclusions. Moscow's central organs had to break Ukraine's resistance and compel its communist party to complete its duties.

Constantly pressured by the All-Union Communist Party, the Central Committee of the CP(b)U and the Soviet Ukrainian government issued a decree on 18 November 1932 punishing independent households as well as collective farms that "maliciously wrecked the grain procurement plan," which included most of the peasants.¹²⁹ These men and women now had to return the meagre grain the government had advanced them. Two days later, those who could not meet the grain quotas had to surrender their

livestock, their last hope against starvation.¹³⁰ These “fines in kind” often exceeded the household’s or collective’s assigned target; these brutal sanctions, in effect, stripped the household or the collective farm bare.

On 28 November 1932, Soviet authorities expanded the use of “blacklists.” They emerged as early as the fall 1929 grain campaign, but became widespread in Ukraine in August 1932, reaching a peak that October and November.¹³¹ By late 1932, the authorities placed well over half of all populated areas in Ukraine, including collective farms, rural soviets, and raions, on these lists.¹³² This vicious punishment, as well as the subsequent removal of all edible goods from the villages, represented a disproportionate response to the drop in grain deliveries to the Soviet state – a death sentence. These areas soon became “zones of death.”¹³³

On 14 December 1932, Stalin and Molotov signed a secret directive which demanded that party cadres “fully complete the grain and sunflower seed procurement plan by the end of January 1933.”¹³⁴ Both men then ordered all collective farms to deliver all grain, including reserves for seeding and nourishment, leaving nothing for the peasants. To meet this goal, the party intensified repressive measures and increased the number of arrests and deportations. In the final paragraph, the edict granted Stanislav Kosior and Vlas Chubar, the primary party leaders in Soviet Ukraine, the right “to suspend the delivery of goods to especially backward districts until they fulfill the grain procurement plan.”¹³⁵ These “goods” included food, nails, tools, salt, and gas, the very materials needed to deliver grain into state hands.¹³⁶

Armed Soviet detachments then confiscated harvested grain, seed, and grain reserves, and suspended food deliveries to the recalcitrant villages. Hunger, starvation, and mass death followed. Young Soviet activists, especially those who had some sort of connection with the peasant world, may have experienced pangs of conscience, and feelings of sympathy, pity, and shame, but a “rationalistic fanaticism” justified their heartless methods against the peasants.¹³⁷ According to Lev Kopelev, one of these activists, “We were realizing historical necessity. We were performing our new revolutionary duty. We were obtaining grain for the socialist fatherland ... We believed, despite what we ourselves had seen, learned, experienced.”¹³⁸ For him and for the hundreds of thousands of true believers, the ends justified the means.

Whatever misgivings some party activists may have experienced, they successfully stripped the rural areas of grain and all edible goods. These procurements triggered a famine, which spread across the Ukrainian countryside between November 1932 and June 1933, reaching a peak

in March–April.¹³⁹ Deaths rose at a horrendous rate. To stop the migration of starving peasants to the cities, in December 1932 the Central Executive Committee of the USSR introduced the internal passport system in the cities and the mandatory registration of individuals in their places of residence. In addition, it prohibited collective farmers from seeking employment in factories and mines unless these industries drafted them in the proper bureaucratic manner. The peasants did not receive passports and experienced discrimination and brutal treatment whenever they entered the cities in search of food.¹⁴⁰

Residents of urban areas fared better. The authorities “passportized” Moscow, Leningrad, Kharkiv, Kiev, Odessa, Minsk, all of the major urban centres situated within one hundred kilometres of the western border, and the most important industrial cities by the spring of 1933. In the process of doing so, they expelled thousands, if not tens of thousands, of vagrants, “unreliable elements,” and people with “a suspicious past” from these cities. With the introduction of internal passports and residence permits, these coveted entitlements provided some food security for the legal inhabitants of the larger cities.¹⁴¹

The Soviet Union’s major metropolises, Moscow and Leningrad, received better and more provisions than other cities.¹⁴² Due to the rationing system in place, their residents may have experienced hunger, but not mass starvation or famine. But those who lived in Ukraine’s cities often witnessed large numbers of bodies of food-deprived peasants “who had somehow bypassed the roadblocks, only to then die in the streets of Kharkiv and Kiev.”¹⁴³

The onslaught of another famine in the fall of 1932 did not impede the party’s final offensive against the peasants. In the early morning of 20 December, Kaganovich forced the Ukrainian Politburo to raise the apportionment for grain requisitions. Nine days later, this political body declared that seed stock reserves also had to be seized in order to fulfil the new plan.¹⁴⁴ This left nothing for the peasants.

Despite these brutal measures, the December 1932 collections in Ukraine did not meet the party’s goals. Instead of 1,207,000 tons, the authorities collected only 650,000 tons.¹⁴⁵ Stalin felt betrayed. In his view, the party, which developed makeshift compromises with the grain-producing regions in lowering the plan’s designated targets before August 1932, received little in return. Ukraine could not even meet the reduced standards. Enough of compromises! The agricultural as well as the industrial plan had to be fulfilled. Requisition everything!

On 22–3 January 1933, the central Politburo, the Communist Party, and the Soviet government issued directives prohibiting the massive outflow of peasants from Ukraine into other regions or entry into Ukraine of peasants from the North Caucasus. They also ordered the arrest of all those who left Ukraine for the Moscow region, the Central Black Earth Region, Belarus, or the Lower and Middle Volga Regions, which possessed more food. The Politburo also suspended the sale of railway tickets to peasants who did not obtain the proper documents from their local governments (soviets) giving them the right to depart.¹⁴⁶ Approximately 220,000 people were arrested; 190,000 were sent back to their villages to starve.¹⁴⁷ These edicts, in effect, sealed the border between Soviet Ukraine and the rest of the USSR for the peasants. Not only were the peasants segregated from the urban population, they were also quarantined from the city limits and from access to food. They began to die by the millions.¹⁴⁸ According to one survivor:

Driven by hunger, people ate everything and anything: even food that had already rotted – potatoes, beets, and other root vegetables that pigs normally refused to eat. They even ate weeds, the leaves and bark of trees, insects, frogs, and snails. Nor did they shy away from eating the meat of diseased horses and cattle. Often that meat was already decaying and those who ate it died of food poisoning.¹⁴⁹

As the famine intensified, food dominated people's thoughts and actions. The amount of time and energy "spent in food-seeking activities increase[d] while the time and energy devoted to activities unrelated to hunger decrease[d]."¹⁵⁰ As physiological starvation set in, people became depressed and apathetic.¹⁵¹ With physical enfeeblement, the survival instinct weakened.¹⁵² The writer Vasily Grossman, a native of Berdichev, graphically described the transition from life to death:

In the beginning, it (hunger) burns and torments you – it tears at your guts, at your soul. And so you try to escape your home. People dig for worms, they gather grass – and yes, they even try to fight their way through to Kiev. Whatever they do, they've got to get out, they've got to get away. And then the day comes when the starving man crawls back into his home. That means hunger has won. This one has given up the struggle; he lies down on his bed and stays there. And once hunger has won, you can't get the man up again, try as you might. Not just because he doesn't have the strength, but because it's all the same to him; he no longer wants to go on living. He just lies there

quietly. All he wants is to be left alone. He doesn't want to eat, he can't stop peeing, he has the runs. All he wants is to sleep, to be left in peace. If you just lie there quietly, it means you're near the end.¹⁵³

Millions passed away, transforming the countryside into a silent wasteland. The children died first, followed by the old and then the middle-aged.¹⁵⁴ Far more men died than women, and far more individual peasants (*edimolichniki*), those who did not belong to collective farms, than members of such farms. According to one Western journalist,

If in many districts ten percent of the collective farmers died, the percentage of mortality among the individual peasants was sometimes as high as twenty-five. Of course, not all who died passed through the typical stages of death from outright hunger, abnormal swellings under the eyes and of the stomach, followed in the last stages by swollen legs and cracking bones. The majority died of slight colds which they could not withstand in their weakened condition; of typhus, the familiar accompaniment of famine; of "exhaustion," to use the familiar euphemistic word in death reports.¹⁵⁵

The inhabitants of thousands of villages perished in the stillness of their homes and fields, often alone. Only the empty, crumbling peasant structures commemorated the once-bustling village life before mass starvation and death by hunger.

Despite these horrific losses, the Stalinist leadership continued to sell grain to Europe. If the USSR exported less than one million centners of grain in 1928, it traded 13 million in 1929, 48.3 million in 1930, 51.8 million in 1931, and 18.1 million in 1932. Even in the worst year of the famine, in 1933, Soviet authorities shipped almost ten million centners to Western Europe.¹⁵⁶

Under normal circumstances, Ukraine and the North Caucasus provided half of the USSR's total marketable grain.¹⁵⁷ In 1930 and 1931, the majority of grain (70 per cent) exported from the USSR came from the Ukrainian SSR and the North Caucasus; the rest came from the Lower Volga and the Central Black Earth Region.¹⁵⁸

Even with the decline in harvests and the decline in grain exports, Stalin did not reallocate the grain the USSR gathered to alleviate the famine. According to Roy Medvedev, "only half of the grain that was exported in 1932–1933 would have been sufficient to save all the southern regions from famine."¹⁵⁹ According to another scholar, the grain exports in 1932–3 were enough "to feed more than five million people for one year."¹⁶⁰ According to a third scholar, "Had Moscow stopped all grain exports and

released all strategic grain reserves, the available 2.6 million tons of grain, under optimal conditions of distribution, might have saved up to 7.8 million lives, which was the approximate number of actual deaths of the 1932–1933 famine.”¹⁶¹ But the Kremlin continued to export and did not accept any foreign aid. In 1933, mass death from starvation “could have been averted but was not because the Stalinist regime did not, as yet, wish to end the famine, because it served their geopolitical ends.”¹⁶²

Despite a poor harvest, the collapse of the food distribution network, a raging famine engulfing tens of millions of lives, and depressed wheat prices on world markets, grain exports remained the Soviet state’s first priority. The ruthless logic of radical collectivization and industrialization induced Stalin and his inner circle to pursue a demographic catastrophe. For party leaders and economic planners, the quality of peasant life in the overpopulated grain-producing areas always remained far less important than the USSR’s overall national defence and urban food security. Outside of producing for the urban workers, the military, and industrialization, the peasants remained irrelevant to the scientifically grounded Marxist vision of history. In the Stalinist working-class-centred interpretation of the world, peasants were expendable; defiant Ukrainian peasants, especially those who opposed the Soviet order in 1917–20 (and now collectivization), even more so.

Urban residents also suffered, although certainly not to the degree that the peasants did.¹⁶³ In addition to less bread, those living in the cities acquired smaller amounts of meat, dairy products, and fish. Workers in Moscow and Leningrad, “comparatively well provisioned in comparison to other towns, went hungry. Stores did not even have enough food to honor ration cards ... and prices in the free peasant markets skyrocketed.”¹⁶⁴ In the cities of Ukraine in the early 1930s, industrial workers received 800 grams of bread as their daily norm, manual workers 600 grams, and office employees 400.¹⁶⁵

By the summer of 1933, peasants in Ukraine learned their lesson, as Kosior put it, and surrendered. The only way to survive was “to work for the Soviet state.”¹⁶⁶ In the last months of 1933, the agricultural situation changed for the better. Collective farmers in the Ukrainian SSR and the North Caucasus harvested more grain than in the previous two years.¹⁶⁷ The urban centres now received more bread, flour, and foodstuffs. Repression abated. But in this period, epidemic diseases, including typhus, spread throughout Ukraine.¹⁶⁸ The All-Union Central Council of Unions, moreover, continued to receive reports from local union and party officials about malnourished workers in the cities.¹⁶⁹

This total war against the peasants in Ukraine ended in the second half of 1933. Food conditions improved by late 1933 and early 1934, but those who survived the famine in the countryside understood that their plight differed radically from that of those who lived in the towns and cities. By law, economic status, and political position, the peasants remained unequal to their urban cousins until the 1970s and beyond.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Soviet government and the Communist Party embraced a series of decisions to gain total control over the countryside and to ruthlessly exterminate anyone who opposed them. To obtain credits for imports of capital equipment leaders repeatedly proclaimed the need to increase wheat exports. The bumper crop of 1930 helped expand exports from 100,000 metric tons in 1929 to 2.3 million. By 1931, these sales doubled to 5.2 million metric tons, but due to worldwide surpluses the Soviets received less than they anticipated for these crops.¹⁷⁰

By the fall of 1932 the Soviet regime experienced a major crisis. The decline in the export of grain from 1931 to 1932 (from 5.18 to 1.81 million metric tons) as the world price of grain fell created a crisis in the balance of Soviet payments,

forcing the state to suspend payments to foreign specialists and workers, many of whom then left. Their departure, in turn, compounded problems in the newly built factories, which still needed parts, machinery, and the advice of those very same foreign experts. Essential raw materials could also not be imported in the required quantities, and many industrial complexes producing tractors, armaments, vehicles, and other machinery had to stop production for weeks at a time, imperiling the Soviet industrialization campaign ... the German bills of exchange, used in 1931 to re-launch industrialization after the 1930 crisis, were coming due, cities teemed with former peasants deeply inimical to the regime, and there was mounting discontent in the workers' ranks. Moscow feared what would happen if another cut in food rations was announced ... Documents began surreptitiously circulating in Party circles attacking Stalin and his policies. Then, on November 7th, following the celebration of the October Revolution's fifteenth anniversary, Stalin's second wife, Nadezdha Alliluyeva, committed suicide.¹⁷¹

Driven to accumulate capital for industrial development through the sale of wheat, Soviet leaders desperately sought to acquire more grain and sell it on international markets, depressing prices. In doing so, they ignored the economic realities of supply and demand, undermining the Soviet state's ability to earn more capital by withholding grain and waiting for world prices to rise. Although Stalin and his colleagues responded to

the Soviet agricultural crisis by selling less wheat abroad, they did not lower the grain-requisitioning quotas to the point of preventing millions of their own peasants from starving to death.

Population Losses, 1926–1939

Although the Soviet authorities introduced collectivization throughout the USSR, the famines of 1930–4 primarily struck Ukraine (especially its Kiev and Kharkiv oblasts) (see map 7), the northern Caucasus, the middle Volga region, and Kazakhstan, quickly surpassing the famine of 1921–2.¹⁷² As the Russian Empire's and the Soviet Union's long-term breadbasket, Ukraine suffered disproportionate population losses during the collectivization drive, implemented more rapidly and more violently in this republic than in any other Soviet region save Kazakhstan.¹⁷³ The politically induced famine constituted one of the twentieth century's greatest demographic catastrophes among the people of Ukraine, producing an even greater impact than that of the First World War. Famine took several million lives and helped undermine the numerical and proportional strength of the Ukrainians within the republic as well as within the USSR.

Serious estimates of the number of deaths in Ukraine in 1932 and 1933 vary from two million to seven million.¹⁷⁴ The most skilful analyses, those by a joint team of French and Ukrainian demographers and those by Oleh Wolowyna and his Ukrainian colleagues, provide more precise figures. The French-Ukrainian team estimated between four million and five million deaths, and the Wolowyna team 4.5 million for 1932 and 1933, representing approximately 15.3 per cent of the total population of the Ukrainian SSR.¹⁷⁵

According to the most recent research conducted by Wolowyna and his colleagues, between 1932 and 1934 Ukraine lost 3.9 million people in direct losses (excess deaths) and 600,000 in indirect losses (lost births).¹⁷⁶ The total losses in the rural areas equalled 19 per cent of the total 1933 rural population; the corresponding relative total losses in the urban areas approximated 5 per cent of the total 1933 urban population.¹⁷⁷ The largest number, 90 per cent of the total, died in 1933.¹⁷⁸ Possibly 80 per cent of the four million or more Ukrainians who died during the Holodomor "did so in the compressed period of time between March and May 1933."¹⁷⁹ Between 1922 and 1941 more men, women, and children died in the countryside than in the cities, and males suffered higher direct losses than females, both in absolute and relative terms.¹⁸⁰ Excess deaths for children under ten years of age comprised about 25 per cent of all deaths in 1933, both in urban and rural populations.¹⁸¹

In conjunction with these losses, changes in Soviet policies towards the non-Russians and the purges of the Soviet Ukrainian political and cultural elites in the 1930s reinforced and accelerated the mass shift from a Ukrainian identity to Soviet and Russian ones, especially in the rapidly expanding urban centres. The Italian consul in Kharkiv, Sergio Gradenigo, predicted in a report to his government that the

current disaster will bring about a preponderantly Russian colonization of Ukraine. It will transform its ethnographic character. In a future time, perhaps very soon, one will no longer be able to speak of a Ukraine, or of a Ukrainian people, and thus not even of a Ukrainian problem, because Ukraine will become a *de facto* Russian region.¹⁸²

Although Gradenigo's prognosis did not unfold in this manner, Ukraine's demographic catastrophe played a serious and indelible role in the making of Stalinist, post-Stalinist, and post-Soviet Ukraine, especially its political crises after 1991. The population of the Soviet Union expanded by fifteen million between 1926 and 1937 (from 147 million to 162 million), but all Soviet republics or national groups did not grow at the same rate.¹⁸³ The overwhelming majority of republics, including the RSFSR, enjoyed an upsurge. Others, such as Ukraine, garnered only a modest accrual from 29 million in 1926 to 30.1 million in 1937, an average annual increase of 100,000.¹⁸⁴ Kazakhstan, however, experienced the most dramatic population loss, from 6.5 million in 1926 to 4.8 million eleven years later.¹⁸⁵

Rapid collectivization, mass industrialization, the adoption of pro-Russocentric policies, the famines, and the purges upset the demographic balance between Ukrainians and Russians in the USSR (see table 6.2) and within the Ukrainian SSR. Between 1932 and 1933, the number of those who identified themselves as Ukrainians within the USSR declined by approximately 20 to 30 per cent.¹⁸⁶

Between 1926 and 1937, the population of the USSR shifted radically in favour of the Russians, who increased their proportion of the total Soviet population from 53 to 58 per cent, while the Ukrainians dropped from 21 to 16 per cent.¹⁸⁷ In the RSFSR itself, the self-identified Ukrainian population declined from 7.9 million in 1926 to 3.1 million in 1937.¹⁸⁸ (In 1937, 549,859 self-identified Ukrainians lived in Kazakhstan, which formed part of the RSFSR until 1936, when it became a full union republic.)¹⁸⁹ The changes in the administrative borders within the Soviet Union and the dismantlement of all Ukrainization programs outside the Ukrainian SSR with the 14 December

Table 6.2 Number of Russians and Ukrainians within the USSR, 1926–1939

Year	Russians	Per cent Russian	Ukrainians	Per cent Ukrainian	Total Soviet population
1926	77.8 million	53.0	31.2 million	21.3	146.6 million
1937	93.9 million	58.0	26.4 million	16.3	162.0 million
1939	99.6 million	58.3	28.1 million	16.2	170.6 million

Source: The statistics come from: (1926): *Kommunisticheskaia Akademiia, Komissiia po izucheniiu natsional'nogo voprosa, Natsional'naia politika VKP(b) v tsifrah* (Moscow: Izd. Kommunisticheskoi Akademii, 1930), 36, 38; (1937): *Akademiia nauk SSSR, Vsesoiuznaia perepis naseleniia 1937 g. Kratkie itogi* (Moscow: Institut istorii SSSR AN SSSR, 1991), 83; and *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki (RGAE), f. 1562, op. 329, d. 145, l. 8*; and (1939): *RGAE, f. 1562, op. 329, d. 4537, l. 62*; in *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1939 goda/Vsesoiuznai perepis' naseleniia 1937 goda* (Woodbridge, CT: Research Publications (Primary Source Media); Moscow: Federal Archival Service of Russia, 2000), reel 2; and *Rossiiskaia Akademiia nauk and Upravlenie statistiki naseleniia Goskomstata, Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1939 goda: Osnovnye itogi* (Moscow: Nauka, 1992), 57.

1932 Stalin-Molotov decree, may explain the “decline” of nearly half of the self-identified Ukrainian population in Russia from 1926 to 1937.

Although the overall number of residents of Soviet Ukraine increased in this period, its self-identified Ukrainian component shrank from 23.2 million in 1926 to 22.2 million in 1937, then advanced slightly from 1937 to 1939 (23.7 million), if the results of the 1939 census are to be believed. The Ukrainian percentage of the republic’s population ebbed away from 80 in 1926 to 78.2 in 1937 to 76.5 by 1939.¹⁹⁰ Parallel to this trend, the rural community plummeted from 23.6 million (in 1926) to 20.1 million (1937), while the population of the urban communities rose from 5.2 to 10 million.¹⁹¹ But the radical decrease in the number of those self-identified Ukrainians living in the countryside did not necessarily represent an exodus to the cities or assimilation into the Russian culture.

In contrast to the Ukrainians within the Ukrainian SSR, the republic’s Russian population increased not only in number, but also in percentage of the total population. The number of Russians surged from 2.7 million (1926) to 3.2 million (1937) to 4.1 million (1939), from 9 per cent of the republic’s total population to 13.5 per cent.¹⁹² This represented nearly a 50 per cent increase. Although 100,000 fewer people identified themselves as Jews in 1937 than in 1926, they remained the third most populous national group in Ukraine, still constituting 5 per cent of the total population.

Ukraine's Holodomor of 1932–3 caused this extreme demographic distortion. Marriage and birth rates plunged dramatically and the mortality rate skyrocketed. The people of Ukraine, especially those in the countryside, suffered a monstrous number of excess deaths and lost births.

Kazakhstan also experienced a ruthless collectivization drive, which focused on extensive grain and livestock procurements, not the forced settlement of the republic's nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples. Famine broke out shortly after the Soviet authorities seized most of the Kazakh herds, in part "to replenish the stocks of Kazakhstan's Russian and Ukrainian regions already devastated by collectivization."¹⁹³ Recognizing this state effort as an act attacking their way of life, the nomads and pastoralists resisted passively and actively.¹⁹⁴ Almost 1.5 million Kazakh men, women, and children died between 1930 and 1934 and hundreds of thousands fled the republic.¹⁹⁵ Between 33 and 38 per cent of the Kazakh population and 8 to 9 per cent of the Slavic/European population passed away.¹⁹⁶ The proportion of Kazakhs within the USSR fell from 2.6 per cent of the total population in 1926 to 1.7 in 1937, mirroring the overall Ukrainian decline within the Soviet population.¹⁹⁷ Although the Kazakhs lost fewer in absolute numbers than the Ukrainians during the famine, they experienced the deaths of a greater percentage of their total population.¹⁹⁸ There were also several hundred thousand victims in the North Caucasus (including many Ukrainians living there) and, on a smaller scale, in the Volga region.¹⁹⁹