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Patricia A. McManigal, Boise State University, undergraduate student, “The Holodomor: The Trickle-Down effect of Political and Economic Choices”

Abstract: The choices made by political leaders do not merely affect those that hold office, rather there is a trickle-down effect that touches every life within their nation. The event known as the Holodomor was a Ukrainian famine during the 1930s. Stalin’s decisions were based upon impressions created during the Russian famine in the 1920s under Lenin’s leadership. Previous research supports the widely agreed upon determination that the famine was not a side effect of natural causes, but rather the direct result of Stalin’s collectivism. Furthermore, the U.N. declared the event to be genocide and not due to poorly directed actions made by idealistic leaders, but deliberate actions taken as a result of a political power struggle which resulted in the deaths of millions. This paper investigates the trickle-down effects of choices made by political leaders throughout the famine. I have identified tales of survivors, such as that of Aleksandra Mikhailovna Safronova Graybeal, in which we see the indirect costs of economic choices and political schemes upon those with no political connections. My exploration of the survivor’s tales indicates that those with no political power are hit the hardest as the actions of political machinations take effect over those they govern.

The Holodomor:
The Trickle-Down Effect of Political and Economic Choices

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The event known as the Holodomor of the 1930s lasted merely two short years. However, the implications that colored every decision made began during a famine in the 1920s. Its ramifications were profound and extensive. The Ukrainian Famine of 1920, the first Soviet-influenced famine, was made more complicated by inaction and prejudice. While this famine rendered the republic devastated, Ukraine's bereavement from the Holodomor signifies that the damage was far more extreme than anyone could have envisioned and left the republic crushed beneath the heel of the mighty Soviet Union. The Holodomor, a Ukrainian term meaning death by starvation (under the connotation of murder or execution), was perpetrated upon Ukraine's people through deliberate actions taken at Stalin's behest despite multiple pleas from Ukrainian officials for assistance. Stalin's perceptions of the reality of the Ukrainian Famine situation in 1920 and his personal biases brought forth decisions in the 1930s that were catastrophic. It is little shifts in opinions, attitudes, and choices that slowly edge closer and closer to taking the fatal step that ultimately brings about genocide. The Holodomor is the direct result of such shifts. Like the 1920s famine, the Soviet Union suffered drought, poor organization, and grain requisition through collectivization. However, in the 1930s, Ukraine was subjected to "active inaction" due to the role that Stalin's choices played. There is a lasting effect that trickles down and affects those who have no political pull. This effect identifies the direct and indirect results of Stalin's choices that led to the death of an estimated 5 million people. The Holodomor survivors tell of their experiences in vivid imagery, leaving a mental picture of the trickle-down effect left in the wake of the choices and calculations of the government's elected course of action.

After the Russian Revolution in 1917, Russia faced many obstacles, many of which held the slowly forming Soviet Union on the cusp of disaster. Famine was a familiar foe. In 1918,

Lenin wrote a letter to the Workers of Petrograd addressing the cause of the 1918 famine and expectation of every person. Lenin insisted that the fault did not lie with the ability to produce grain; instead, it resulted from hoarding and misappropriation by the bourgeoisie. He set the order that "He who does not work, neither shall he eat,"ⁱ thereby establishing the precedent that only the lazy and selfish were going hungry. According to Lenin, this order had three requirements for it to succeed in feeding every person.ⁱⁱ The first requirement included a state grain monopoly, prohibiting any private sale or use of surplus grain. The second was establishing a faultless transportation organization required to ensure surplus grain movement to areas facing shortages.ⁱⁱⁱ The third was to set up the proper distribution of bread to all citizens, showing no favoritism or privilege for those that held financial benefits.

Furthermore, Lenin established a "communist task" for the working and poor citizens to fight capitalism in all its forms. Lenin stated, "When the people are starving, when unemployment is becoming ever more terrible, anyone who conceals an extra pood [sic] of grain, anyone who deprives the state of a pood [sic] of fuel is an out and out criminal."^{iv} This criminalization of using food outside the government determined necessities created a crusade among the workers to prove their worth. The same Red Army that gained victory over its enemy was set in place as the Ukrainian Labour Army. Their efforts were to be focusing on collecting grains and enforcing the party's economic outlook. In a dispatch from Josef Stalin, as Chairman of the Ukrainian Labour Army Council, dated in March of 1920, he believed that it was necessary to approach the economic difficulties in the same way that the Civil War was won.^v Stalin declared that the Labour Army's effort must be "ruthless" with "an unflinching priority" to gather the required requisitions at any cost as the state interests must come first.^{vi} All food grains, including those needed for immediate consumption and planting, were to be confiscated.

Lenin's government intended to bring about an industrial revolution; however, funds were needed for this process. The Soviet Union was faced with two options, take out loans or export food that brought a premium price due to famines throughout Europe. The leader chose to avoid debt; they collected and exported thousands of tons of grain to foreign countries.^{vii} Just as Ukrainian crops were sent out to the cities, tens of thousands of pounds of grain were earmarked to be sold to the foreign nations of Germany, France, Finland, and other Western European countries. In *The Bolshevik*, a Communist party paper, one week an article celebrated that 16,000 tons of grain were shipped to Hamburg, Germany. The next, it quietly informed its readers that millions were starving or, worse yet, had died from hunger in Soviet Union.^{viii} The Communist party line kept the tone neutral when it came to the losses and optimistic in the face of exportation and growth.

In a report given to the Second All-Russia Congress of Political Education Department on October 17, 1921, Lenin addressed his concerns and how the NEP addressed the growing fears that the people were beginning to voice. His approach was to remind the people where they were economically and stressed the need for order. Lenin called for "strict, stern measures" and assured those in attendance that if they did not govern with a firmer hand than those that came before, i.e. the capitalists, they would not be able to "vanquish" them.^{ix} He further declared that sentiment was as much a crime as cowardice in war, and as such, the "sternest disciplinary measures" must be adopted.^x The desperation of the situation was growing, and Lenin proved that toleration and accommodations were not allowed in any way.

The world knew of the crises that challenged the Soviet Union in the 1920s. *Pravda*, the official Soviet Union newspaper, reported that 25 million faced hunger and eventually announced that many were dying from starvation. Aid from various countries poured in,

including that from the United States under J Edgar Hoover's guiding hand. The American Relief Administration (ARA) provided food for tens of thousands. However, the American's effort fell under scrutiny and suspicion due to previous underhanded actions and intentions during the Russian Revolution of 1917. Furthermore, Lenin and Stalin considered Hoover's actions were disrespectful, a power move, and calculated. Hoover was very vocal in his disdain for Communism and any government that exported food while its citizens were starving.^{xi} Stalin further viewed the United States' attempt to assist as a perversion of charity.^{xii}

During Stalin's administration, collectivization was embraced by authorities as a way to destroy localized, traditional leadership. This effort was specifically true in Ukraine, which exhibited a desire toward nationalism and independence. There were two primary purposes for collectivization. The first was to procure enough grain to provide stability, while the Soviet Union established Stalin's 5-year plan to industrialize. The second purpose was to create gradual collectivization of the agricultural process and industrialization. These actions were a way of ensuring that all production was used as declared by the state. This process was intended to take several years and required compliance among the people, the farmers, and the workers. Stalin stated that he was not concerned with gaining this compliance through the process as voluntary adherence could easily be replaced with compulsion.^{xiii} A benefit of the collectivization was to include the practice of providing machinery and enhanced agricultural techniques. The theories were taught through educational programs that the peasantry could apply to attend. On paper, the idea of collectivization was a success waiting to happen; however, the reality was a harsh instructor.

The original plan for collectivization was to slowly move from each stage to the next as the path was adequately prepared. In actuality, the progression was swift and ruthless as another

famine came on the horizon in 1931. Stalin's implementation of Lenin's three requirements for success failed. The promised machinery and harvest equipment were not readily available for all to use as needed, often leaving the grain to rot in the fields.^{xiv} While the machines made the harvest more manageable, they also made the act of gleaning impossible. Policies were set in place that made it illegal to glean leftover potatoes or the remaining wheat stalk. Nadia Shulha (nee Symonets) remembered going to collect the wheat stalks and were refused admittance even though the harvester was broken.^{xv} Locals, all of which who were facing starvation, were not allowed to use the grain for themselves.

Further problems developed as the transportation to move grain effectively was not designed in time for harvest seasons. Often grain was found rotten in trucks on roads or in train cars waiting for transport. Maria Lysenko spoke of grains at the depot waiting for shipment out of town.^{xvi} Grain was left to sit in train cars or bags along the roads' side as it waited for long periods to be transported to the cities for use, stored as reserves, and more often than not, exported to other nations. The grain remained there for months, even through the winter. One day, out of desperation, a neighbor tried to steal a handful of grain and was "shot on the spot."^{xvii}

Collectivization proved hard for all as grain was not the only item that was confiscated. Communist demands included chicken eggs and milk that often exceeded the actual production. Aleksandra (Safranova) Greybeal recalled that if the chicken egg production was insufficient to meet the requisition demands, the family was still liable to either produce the eggs or pay fines equivalent to the missing bounty.^{xviii} Another memory concerned the effort they took to reach the production requirements for milk. Aleksandra's family had taken steps for their cow to produce a calf, and just before the calf was born, the still pregnant milk cow was confiscated.^{xix} The milk requirements remained in place, so the family procured a new cow, retraced the steps to produce

a calf to meet production needs, and it, too, was also confiscated shortly before the calf's birth.^{xx} Confiscation amidst requirements was not unique to this province and showed that cruelty was dealt with all. Natalia Talenchuk was the daughter of a factory director, and therefore part of the elite class. She remembers her classmates coming to school with swollen bodies and seeing their families at the torgsyn table. This table was set up to exchange heirlooms and jewelry for the opportunity to harvest grain and corn from the field. Desperate families exchanged their precious keepsakes for hope. Natalia watched the families as they gleaned in the field and was shocked as she witnessed them being shot for theft, including every man, woman, and child.^{xxi} This trickle-down effect came as a result of leaders heeding the decisions from Stalin's administration. It affected all of those under their authority.

A strong belief held by party members was that collectivization was a punishment for those who refused to sell grain to the state. As problems surfaced, communist party members began to resist collectivization and turned in their party member cards.^{xxii} However, collectivization meant that power resided with government officials, and all others had lost any voice about how their lives were spent. Their protesting opinion of collectivization did not matter, nor did they have a right to work against the local authorities actively. Their lack of political pull put the party members at a disadvantage and at risk of the effects that would trickle down. Aleksandra Graybeals's family delayed joining the collective system, and the government began "putting the squeeze on."^{xxiii} Heavy taxes were levied upon the family, higher demands and requisitions of production were imposed. They continued harassment that was "designed to bring [them to their] knees" and force capitulation into joining the system.

Aleksandra's family attempted to make the best of the situation, but there was no best-case scenario. Maria Boratynksa (nee Myshalov) remembered a man in her village who refused

to submit to his personal garden's collectivization. The officials took everything from him and stated the government-owned everything.^{xxiv} If he did not work, he could not have anything. They plowed his garden and planted buckwheat. They refused to allow him to harvest the buckwheat and left it to rot in the yard. Only a single stool was left in the home. He was a cobbler by trade, and neighbors brought him shoes to fix and paid him with food so that he did not starve.^{xxv}

Further trickle-down effects came in the form of a black market that included everything among its goods. Aleksandra Graybeal's family made homemade butter and sold it for two bars of soap. Her father then resold one soap bar to a neighbor. The neighbor gladly took it in return for a small amount of grain and then reported Aleksandra's father for selling black market goods and hoarding grain to the police. Aleksandra's father was imprisoned, and their house was searched for all food items and the remaining bar of soap. Thankfully, Aleksandra's family was close to one of the officials, and he was released the next day, but this was not the typical punishment for those who dealt in black market goods, especially for those that tried to hide food. Luba Kachmarska's family was not so lucky. Her family grew potatoes and buried several bags for their later use. Upon hearing a rumor, officials searched until the bags were discovered. The potatoes were laced with a white, poisonous powder.^{xxvi} The officials confiscated all seeds and destroyed everything they could find. Luba's father was taken into custody and never returned home.

The black market held foods that were far from what most would call edible except the very desperate. Many returned to the foodstuffs of the 1920s famine: grass, horse tack, dogs, cats, and rats. Soon those items would become just as scarce as grain and potatoes. Nina Kohut was yelled at by her parents for running out into the street alone. Her parents told her to never go

alone anywhere without someone older because children were being stolen and ground into "Schnitzel and pies." At first, she felt her parents were being overly cautious and trying to scare her into obedience. However, while at the market, she witnessed a police officer eating a pie when he found a "piece of nail and finger in it."^{xxvii} This moment brought on a dawning realization of the hazardous act of running alone. Likewise, Vera Shumylo remembered a schoolmate that went missing after seeing her looking nothing but "skin and bones." Rumors were running around that her schoolmate was ground for food.^{xxviii} She refused to believe it. During dinner one night, she found a fingernail in some sausage her mother had picked up from the market that day. Startled, Vera called for her mother and was told, "daughter, be quiet," as the meal continued in disturbed silence.^{xxix} The black market provided provisions at a high cost. This trickle-down effect cost the lives of many as neighbors turned on neighbors, and soon even those meager provisions were not enough.

Many tried to run from starvation. Attempts to cross the border were made on the trains, on roads, and through the woods. Aleksandra Greybeal's parents, out of desperation, sent Aleksandra, age 8, and her sisters into the city in the hopes that they would find food more readily available.^{xxx} The girls snuck onto the train and hid beneath the seats, remaining there for the trip's duration. Upon arrival in the city, the girls had nowhere to go, no relatives to turn to, so they survived the best they could on the streets. They ate food out of the trash, begged for scraps, and worked until they were too sick and forced to return home. Others tried to leave the republic with the intention to bring food home to their families. Like Vera Shumylo's mother, many Ukrainians would take their family heirlooms into the city and exchange them for food. However, upon their return, the police inspected their belongings to confiscate all food from other areas into the region. Further attempts to leave were to escape the famine altogether.

However, most of the peasantry did not have passports or travel papers, like Fedir Tkachenko's family. They moved from place to place in hiding as their mother attempted to avoid arrest for leaving their home region without the legal right to find food.^{xxxix} Eventually, those families were caught and dealt harsh punishments.

In January 1933, Stalin's choices brought new hardships in the form of the Law of Inviolability of Socialist Property.^{xxxix} This law reintroduced all food and production confiscations, stopped all food deliveries from outside of Ukraine, and instituted the "5 ears of wheat" law. This law condemned anyone, even suspected of theft, to death or ten years of hard labor (normally reserved for treason and murder).^{xxxix} The trickle-down effect was that men, women, and children began dying. Stalin chose to acknowledge a poor harvest as the cause of the deaths. Moreover, Stalin didn't blame the deaths on the collectivization practices, the increased quotas, or the cessation of assistance; instead, he accused 35 party leaders of conspiracy and treason.^{xxxix} Stalin blamed them for sabotaging the harvest.

Ukrainian Nationalism's return became a hated perspective by Soviet leaders, especially by Stalin, whose personal bias was confirmed by the increasing objection to collectivization. Stalin's administration anchored its beliefs in working together and shunning the individual, both the person and the nation. The Ukrainian desire to be independent of the Soviet Union was the antithesis of communistic tendencies. This resurgence of nationalism encouraged Stalin's belief that the grain growers and those starving were not innocent. Although communist party leaders within Ukraine requested assistance, Stalin's refusal burned with contempt for the growers. It indicated that they were not victims but perpetrators of war against Soviet power.^{xxxix} Stalin elected to further his dedication to Ukraine's utter destruction, including those with no political power or public influence. He never denied his actions in 1933 caused the deaths of millions of

people. However, Stalin stated that his inactions were due to the choices made by the victims themselves. He indicated that had they worked harder, been more dedicated to the cause, and not fought against Communism, they would have survived, thus echoing Lenin's declaration that he who does not work does not eat. Stalin denounced nationalism during a congress meeting in 1934, declaring war on Ukraine as these "former people" were a danger to the Soviet Union.^{xxxvi}

In a Ukrainian leader letter, Mikhail Kaganovich requested assistance for the people stating the dire situation. However, in his letter, he inadvertently conveyed to Stalin the attitudes and sentiments of the people he represented. These reports included much of the party members' responses to the increased requisitions of grain, stating that many people began fighting collectivization, not out of true anti-collectivization sentiment, but rather out of sheer necessity.^{xxxvii} The requisition orders were far too high for the famine-stricken land to produce. Stalin's response could have saved the Ukrainian people.

Lenin's choices during the famine in the 1920s brought about Stalin's belief that Ukrainian leaders and party members were not on the side of the Soviet Union. He felt that all requests for assistance were due to poor work ethics, individual laziness, and the intention to undermine the Soviet leader. Every choice he made echoed his opinion, and the outcome held consequences that Stalin embraced. Throughout the Holodomor, Stalin was consulted about each new development. He dismissed the reports detailing the dire straits that Ukraine faced. His outstanding beliefs that Ukraine was against him and the Soviet Union drove him, and in this, he allowed his choices to be dictated by his biases. Stalin's political decisions during the Holodomor were intended to bring the republic under the Soviet wing. While it succeeded in bringing Ukraine to heel, it was the trickle-down effects that held a far higher cost than mere political submission. The farmers watched their grain rot in the fields and streets; the elderly sacrificed

themselves so their grandchildren could have a chance only for them to go missing. Stalin, the Ukrainian authorities, and individual Communist party members made each choice much farther-reaching than political boundaries and power struggles. Those decisions are etched on the hearts and minds of every child that survived the atrocities. They held no power and played no role in the decisions made, and yet, as the effects trickled down from choices made by the political machinations, it was the people who became targeted and destroyed all in the name of power.

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