NO MONOPOLY OF MISERY

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Editorial, 11 April 2015

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Why were the Ukrainians killed? They were killed because they resisted the Soviet collectivization (kolkhoz) of their farms.

How were they killed? Through artificial famine, mass execution, and exile to the Siberian labor gulags.

In the first months of 1932 a minority Ukrainians put up a meager armed resistance against collectivization. It was a war of pitchforks against machine guns. The Ukrainian farmers lost. Joseph Stalin declared Ukrainians enemies of the state. Jails appeared practically everywhere. Army units were brought and some soldiers were lodged in homes without permission. Various torture methods were utilized. One of the more 'popular' forms was path-threading. Farmers were forced to march, in the snow, from one village to the next and the next and the next…until they collapsed and died.

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Some 25,000 fanatical communist youth from across the USSR were brought to impose collectivization. The young commissars were supported by the army and the GPU (secret police). The Soviets first eliminated the leaders of the community (rich farmers, the clergy, writers, and teachers) so as to leave the nation rudderless. The government confiscated food from pantries. It

was murder by hunger or genocide by hunger. The once "breadbasket of Europe", Ukraine was transformed into arid shell. The soil, which was black loam and thus extremely fertile, became parched like bone. By the end of 1932 some 80% of the farms had been collectivized.

To further break the spirit of the Ukrainians, Moscow burned churches and books. National monuments were razed. Wearing national costume was banned. Priests were executed or sent to labor camps.

Why didn't the world know about Stalin's horrific crime? The Soviets made sure the world didn't hear about it. The world was also preoccupied by the Great Depression. People visiting the Soviet Union were not allowed to go to Ukraine. Several Soviet apologists, including—incredibly—celebrated writer George Bernard Shaw and William Duranty, Moscow chief (1922 to 1936) of the 'New York Times' claimed all was well in Ukraine. Duranty, who was close to Stalin, described the dictator as "the greatest living statesman." Durante wrote in 1932: "There is no famine or actual starvation nor is likely to be." He even had good words for the notorious Soviet show trials. Decades later British writer-broadcaster Malcolm Muggeridge said Duranty was "the greatest liar of any journalist I have met in 50 years of journalism." But the condemnation was too late. Millions had been starved to death in those two years.

Decades later, when Diaspora Ukrainians began to tell their nation's tale of woe, the world had difficulty believing. Some denied it had taken place. Finally, respected writers such as British historian Robert Conquest and writer Douglas Tottle proved—through their books--that the Holodomor, the genocide of Ukrainians--was a fact. But to this day, many countries refuse to recognize the tragedy.

Among the states which don't recognize the Holodomor is Armenia.

In mid-March Ukrainian MP Borys Tarasyuk condemned Yerevan's lack of recognition during an interview with 'Zhoghovurd' daily. Tarasyuk, co-chair of Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, said: "Now I ask you, why does Armenia deny the existence of Holodomor in all possible ways? For example, I think that the Armenian Genocide is a crime, then why does Armenia and Armenians not consider the death of 7 million Ukrainians as genocide?"

Why? Indeed.

For many years we have justifiably condemned states, scholars, and media which have denied our genocide. We have accused them of realpolitik and worse. So how do we explain Yerevan's denial of a tragedy which happened so close to Armenia? The Armenian government knows well what happened a stone's throw away from Armenia. As well, the Holodomor echoes so many aspects of our Genocide: the elimination of community leaders; the asymmetrical fight; the destruction of national heritage; the forced marches (in Ukraine's case through snow); the persistent denial; the hired denialist authors…

Genocide is the systematic and widespread extermination or attempted extermination of a national, racial, religious, or ethnic group. The Holodomor fits the definition to a T. The Holodomor ("Great Famine") is a twin of our "Medz Yeghern".

Armenians have a long history of friendly relations with Ukrainians. After Ani was conquered thousands of Armenians fled to Eastern Europe, particularly to Ukraine where they prospered and were sometimes given privileges.

On April 3 a draft law on recognizing the Armenian Genocide was submitted to Ukraine's chief lawmaking body, Verkhovna Rada (Parliament). Well-known Ukrainian political experts, scientists, politicians and public figures have requested their president and parliament to recognize the Armenian Genocide at the legislative level, according to Armeniapedia website. Bills have been proposed and individual communities have recognized the Armenian Genocide and there are memorials in various places in Ukraine, says Ukrainian-Canadian author Marsha Skyrpuch who has written extensively about the Armenian Genocide. She believes Ukraine hasn't recognized the Armenian Genocide because of the "dysfunctional nature of their government." Ms. Skrypuch points out that the Holodomor was not recognized in Ukraine until 2006.

In late March the National Assembly of Armenia recognized the Assyrian and Pontic genocides perpetrated by Turkey. On the threshold of our Genocide centennial, Armenia should recognize the Great Famine of Ukraine just over 80 years ago. No ifs or buts.