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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MATERIALS ON THE 1932–1933 HOLODOMOR IN UKRAINE PUBLISHED IN THE NEWSPAPER «MANCHESTER GUARDIAN»

Abstract. Objective of the Study. The aim of the article is a comparative analysis of the publications of the Manchester Guardian from September 1933 that covered the events of the Holodomor in Ukraine. Particular attention is given to texts that confirmed the fact of the Holodomor and those that denied it.

Scientific Novelty. Despite the growing research interest in the representation of the Holodomor of 1932–1933 in Ukraine within the English-language information space, a number of aspects of this topic remain underexplored. One of them is the coexistence of opposing interpretations of the tragedy within a single publication. The Manchester Guardian materials from September 1933 make it possible to trace how two different approaches to covering the tragic events in Ukraine functioned simultaneously. Some publications were based on concrete facts, eyewitness testimonies, statistical data, and references to specific localities. Others presented general assessments without clarifying sources and often reproduced key theses of Soviet propaganda. Some of these texts also included uncritical praise of the Soviet political and economic model.

Conclusions. In September 1933, the Manchester Guardian became one of the key English-language sources that documented the reaction of the European information space to the Holodomor in Ukraine. The publications that confirmed the existence of the famine were characterized by a high degree of factual accuracy. They contained concrete testimonies, statistical data, references to specific localities, and contextual details that made it possible to reconstruct the situation on the ground. These materials provided a foundation for understanding the tragedy as a systemic phenomenon rather than an accidental food crisis. At the same time, the publications that questioned or directly denied the famine were based on generalizations formed during brief visits to the Soviet Union. Some of these texts reproduced the official rhetoric of Soviet propaganda, including claims of high harvest yields, peasant satisfaction, and positive developments in the country. Certain authors not only denied the existence of the crisis but also openly praised the achievements of the USSR, disregarding the humanitarian consequences of the policies being implemented.

Keywords: Holodomor; Manchester Guardian; English-language press; Soviet Union; propaganda; 1933; Ukraine; media discourse.

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ПОРІВНЯЛЬНИЙ АНАЛІЗ МАТЕРІАЛІВ ІЗ ВИСВІТЛЕННЯ ГОЛОДОМОРУ 1932–1933 РР. В УКРАЇНІ В ГАЗЕТІ «MANCHESTER GUARDIAN»

Анотація. Мета статті. Метою статті є порівняльний аналіз публікацій газети «Manchester Guardian» за вересень 1933 р., в яких висвітлено події Голодомору в Україні. Особливу увагу приділено текстам, що підтверджували факт Голодомору, і тим, що його заперечували.

Наукова новизна. Попри зростання дослідницького інтересу до відображення Голодомору 1932–1933 рр. в Україні в англомовному інформаційному просторі, низка аспектів цієї теми залишається малодослідженою. Одним із них є співіснування протилежних трактувань трагедії в межах одного видання. Матеріали «Manchester Guardian» за вересень 1933 року дозволяють прослідкувати, як дві різні підходи до висвітлення трагічних подій в Україні функціонували одночасно. Деякі публікації ґрунтувалися на конкретних фактах, свідченнях очевидців, статистичних даних та посиланнях на певні локалітети. Інші ж надавали загальні оцінки без уточнення джерел і часто повторювали ключові тези радянської пропаганди. Деякі з цих текстів також включали некритичне схвалення радянської політичної та економічної моделі.

сень 1933 р. дають змогу простежити, як одночасно функціонували два різні підходи до висвітлення трагічних подій в Україні. Одні публікації ґрунтувалися на конкретних фактах, свідченнях очевидців, статистичних даних та згадках про окремі населені пункти. Інші подавали загальні оцінки без уточнення джерел і часто відтворювали ключові тези радянської пропаганди. Частина таких текстів також містила некритичне вихваляння політичної та економічної моделі СРСР.

Висновки. Газета «Manchester Guardian» у вересні 1933 р. стала одним із ключових англомовних джерел, які зафіксували реакцію європейського інформаційного простору на Голодомор 1932–1933 рр. в Україні. Публікації, що підтверджували факт Голодомору, позначені високим рівнем фактажів. Вони містять конкретні свідчення, статистичні дані, згадки про населені пункти та обставини, що дозволяють реконструювати ситуацію на місцях. Ці матеріали створювали підґрунтя для осмислення трагедії як системного явища, а не випадкової продовольчої кризи. Водночас публікації, що ставили під сумнів факт Голодомору або прямо його заперечували, ґрунтувалися на узагальненнях, отриманих під час коротких візитів до СРСР. Частина таких текстів відтворювала офіційну риторику радянської пропаганди, зокрема твердження про високу врожайність, задоволення селян і позитивні зміни в державі. Деякі автори не лише заперечували факт Голодомору, а й відверто захоплювалися досягненнями СРСР, не беручи до уваги негативні гуманітарні наслідки від реалізації радянської політики.

Ключові слова: Голодомор, Manchester Guardian, англомовна преса, СРСР, радянська пропаганда, 1933 рік, Україна, історична публіцистика.

Problem statement

In 1933, in the context of intensified Soviet informational isolation of Ukrainian society, the topic of the Holodomor in Ukraine became the subject of public discussion in the English-language press. One of the central platforms of this discussion was the British newspaper «Manchester Guardian». In September of the same year, a series of articles and letters to the editor were published on its pages, representing two opposing positions: the confirmation of the fact of mass and artificial famine in Ukraine and its complete or partial denial. Such polarization of views on the pages of a single publication indicates the complexity of forming an international understanding of the nature and scale of the Holodomor of 1932–1933 in Ukraine.

On the one hand, the authors who wrote about mass mortality, depopulation of villages, the negative consequences of grain procurement policy and forced grain seizure, presented specific facts about the Holodomor, including geographical names of regions affected by the famine, personalized testimonies of eyewitnesses, and statistical data on the victims. On the other hand, the texts that denied the Holodomor were based mainly on subjective impressions from travels across the territory of the USSR, often without specifying particular localities or sources of information, and often repeated theses characteristic of Soviet propaganda. In view of the above, the topic we have raised is relevant for further study and analysis.

Analysis of recent research and publications

The topic of the Holodomor of 1932–1933 in Ukraine is the subject of multifaceted scholarly reflection, in which both Ukrainian and foreign researchers have taken part. Particular attention within this issue has been devoted to the question of how the events were represented in the Western press. A significant contribution to the study of related aspects has been made by a number of authors. In particular, Andrii Kozyskyi analyzed the methods used by the Soviet authorities to deny the Holodomor, as well as the propagandistic narratives aimed at a Western audience in order to distort perceptions of the situation in the USSR¹. Victor Hudz examined the representation of the Holodomor in publications of English-language periodicals, in particular in the materials of the newspaper «Manchester Guardian»². Andrii Mikheiev studied the reaction of the English-speaking world to the events in Soviet Ukraine in 1932–1933.³ Among the sources that deserve particular attention are the reports by Andrew Cairns, published under the title «The Soviet Famine 1932–33: An Eye-Witness Account of Conditions in the Spring and Summer of 1932»⁴. In 1932, he undertook a months-long trip to the USSR, including to Ukraine, with the aim of assessing the state

1 Козицький А. Велика брехня. Методи, наративи та динаміка заперечення Голодомору. Харків. 2023. 368 с.

2 Гудзь В. Початковий етап дослідження історії Голодомору в Україні. *Наукові записки Національного університету «Острозька академія»*. Серія «Історичні науки». 2014. Вип. 22 С. 234 - 246.

3 Mikheiev A. Reaction of the English-speaking world on the Holodomor 1932-1933 in Soviet Ukraine. *European philosophical and historical discourse*. 2022. 8, P. 26-32.

4 Cairns, A. (1989). *The Soviet Famine 1932–33: An Eye-Witness Account of Conditions in the Spring and Summer of 1932*. Edited by Tony Kuz. Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta.

of agriculture. His reports contain information about the socio-economic situation in rural areas, recorded cases of malnutrition, forced resettlements, and the impoverishment of peasants as a result of collectivization. Despite the existence of these and other substantial studies, a significant body of publications in the English-language press that covered the Holodomor in Ukraine — particularly in the newspaper «Manchester Guardian» — still remains beyond the scope of thorough scholarly analysis.

Aim of the article

The purpose of the article is a comparative analysis of the publications of the newspaper «Manchester Guardian» from September 1933 that covered the Holodomor in Ukraine.

Presentation of the main material

The publications of the «Manchester Guardian» from September 1933 concerning the Holodomor of 1932–1933 in Ukraine represent a thematically and generically diverse body of sources, including both editorial materials and numerous letters to the editor. It is important to note that most of the publications confirming the fact of the Holodomor were reprints from other sources or contained direct testimonies of eyewitnesses — in particular, letters from refugees or travelers who had relatives in Ukraine. Such testimonies include specific geographical locations, population loss figures, and descriptions of everyday realities that were difficult to fabricate.

In contrast, the texts denying the Holodomor were also mostly presented in the form of letters to the editor, but were generally based on the experience of short-term trips to the Soviet Union or on propagandistic reports. A characteristic example is the letter by J. Beauchamp, who stated: «I travelled during July of this year over many hundreds of miles over Soviet Ukraine, without a guide or interpreter... I bought food from peasants at the numerous stations at which we stopped»⁵. Similarly, W. Wellock denied the famine in Kyiv, referring to his own observations: «I happened to be in Kiev during the week following the appearance of this article... I certainly saw no signs of famine in Kiev»⁶.

Наголосимо, що обидві групи авторів: як ті, що підтверджували факт голоду, так і ті, що його заперечували, апелювали до особистого досвіду. Проте між цими свідченнями є принципова різниця в доступі до джерел інформації. Ті, хто підтверджував Голодомор, часто посилалися на безпосередні контакти з селянами або листи від рідних, які залишилися в Україні. Їхні опоненти будували свою аргументацію на враженнях від поїздок, часто обмежених великими містами. Наприклад, Дж. Джаггер писав: «I did not see any corpses either in the market-place or in any other part of the city, although I travelled about at pretty extensively»⁷.

The materials that question or directly deny the Holodomor of 1932–1933 in Ukraine are based primarily on personal travel experiences, trust in official information from Soviet sources, and skepticism toward the testimonies of refugees or Western journalists. These publications lack concrete data on demographic losses. Instead of attempting systematic analysis, the authors are generally limited to generalized personal observations, which are not accompanied by verifiable evidence. One of the main voices of this group is J. Beauchamp, who published two letters. In her letter of 7 September 1933, she criticized L. Gibson for publishing a refugee's testimony: «Does anybody who is capable of using his brain at all really believe this statement?... If this statement were true it would mean that roughly a million peasants would have died of starvation...»⁸. In her letter of 18 September 1933, she referred to a statement by French politician Édouard Herriot, who allegedly saw no signs of famine during his trip to Ukraine: «In Ukraine, which had been reported suffering from grain scarcity he had seen nothing but prosperity»⁹.

5 Beauchamp, J. (1933). The harvest in Russia. «Managed» tours. Manchester Guardian, Thu, Sep 07, P. 18.

6 Wellock, W. (1933). An impression of Kiev. Manchester Guardian, Mon, Sep 18, P. 16.

7 Jagger, J. (1933). A visit to the Ukraine. Manchester Guardian, Mon, Sep 18, P. 16.

8 Beauchamp, J. (1933). The harvest in Russia. «Managed» tours. Manchester Guardian, Thu, Sep 07, P. 18.

9 Beauchamp, J. (1933). M. Herriot's statement. Manchester Guardian, Mon, Sep 18, P. 16.

A similar rhetoric was used by the American researcher S. Eddy. In his letter of 8 September 1933, he wrote: «I found this year probably the greatest harvest in history of Russia. As one journeyed by trail or motor, hour after hour one saw the harvested grain standing in shocks in the broad, unfenced fields clear to the horizon»¹⁰. Although S. Eddy acknowledged the suffering of the population during the past winter, he predicted improvements from the new sowing campaign and an increase in the harvest. At the same time, he either dismissed or attempted to rationalize the testimonies about mortality. Thus, when checking the rumors about the village of Havrylivka, he wrote: «We found that among 1,100 families three individuals died of typhus»¹¹.

Another defender of the Soviet point of view was G. H. Barber, who emphasized his independent status and extensive experience of traveling across the USSR: «I have recently returned from an extensive independent tour of Russia, travelling many thousands of miles by air, road, and sea to the most important cities and far-away outlying districts, including Leningrad, Moscow, Kharkov, Sebastopol, Yalta, Odessa, Kiev, etc...»¹². He stated that he had not seen a single case that would confirm the existence of famine: «The harvest this year is over 20 per cent better than last year»¹³. W. Wellock expressed a similar rhetoric. He rejected the information about mass mortality in Kyiv that had been published in the Western press: «In view of my experiences there this quotation appears fantastic and incredible»¹⁴. He also mentioned that 40,000 Kyiv workers voluntarily helped with the harvest and presented this as evidence of the availability of food: «This illustration was given as a proof that there was plenty of work and food for all who was willing to work, and that, no one starved»¹⁵. J. Jagger spoke in the same tone. He claimed that during his trip to Kyiv he did not see «any corpses — neither in the market nor in any other part of the city», and also visited various enterprises and even a rally, where he «did not hear a single word about famine»¹⁶. Thus, his argumentation is based exclusively on personal visual observations, without taking into account other sources of information or critically analyzing reports on the situation in the region. A common feature of most of these letters is the emphasis on individual observations and general impressions gained during a short stay in the USSR. The authors generally did not take into account the socio-economic context or testimonies from other sources, focusing instead on subjective experience and displaying a skeptical attitude toward alternative interpretations. At the same time, none of them provided objective or verified statistical data. Such experience — limited in space and time — cannot be considered sufficient to refute the numerous testimonies about the large-scale humanitarian catastrophe in Ukraine coming from other sources, particularly from direct eyewitnesses.

The publications that supported the existence of the Holodomor of 1932–1933 in Ukraine are characterized by specificity and extensive use of personal testimonies. They appeal to the experiences of refugees as well as to numerous reports in the foreign and Soviet press, which directly or indirectly confirmed the facts of mass mortality, food shortages, cannibalism, and social disintegration. One of the most striking texts was a letter from a refugee from Ukraine, provided by L. Gibson and published in the «Manchester Guardian» on 2 September 1933. The witness, who had fled from Ukraine to Romania, described the systematic grain confiscation: «When the Russians started the grain collection last autumn and winter they not only took the surplus grain, but took absolutely everything to the last grain»¹⁷. The document also spoke about mass mortality and decline in Soviet Ukraine: «Hunger had already started last autumn, and after Christmas deaths occurred from starvation. At first there were single instances, and then they became more frequent, and now they are dying in countless numbers»¹⁸.

10 Eddy, S. (1933). The harvest in Russia. This year and last. Manchester Guardian, Fri, Sep 08, P. 18.

11 Там само, С. 18.

12 Barber, G. H. (1933). Improved conditions. Manchester Guardian, Mon, Sep 18, P. 16.

13 Там само, С. 16.

14 Wellock, W. (1933). An impression of Kiev. Manchester Guardian, Mon, Sep 18, P. 16.

15 Там само, С. 16.

16 Jagger, J. (1933). A visit to the Ukraine. Manchester Guardian, Mon, Sep 18, P. 16.

17 Gibson, L. (1933). Famine in Soviet Ukraine. A Refugee's Letter. Manchester Guardian, Sat, Sep 02, P. 15.

18 Там само, С. 15.

Extremely important as well is the testimony of M. Stebalo — a Ukrainian woman who emigrated to the United States in 1913 but returned to the USSR as a tourist in the summer of 1933 to visit her family. Her account is the testimony of an eyewitness who visited Ukrainian villages suffering from the Holodomor. She learned about the death of her mother and brothers in the village of Pysarivka, where «out of 800 village residents, 150 had died in recent months»¹⁹. The comparison of this experience with the official Soviet rhetoric about a good harvest creates a stark contrast and evokes distrust toward the reports of prosperity. The letter also provides statistical data on the demographic depopulation of entire villages: «In the village of Zalyvanchyna, out of 3,500 residents in 1932, 2,000 had died; in the village of Nemyrinci, only a few families remained»²⁰. Such figures contradict claims about the localized or temporary nature of the Holodomor and testify to its scale and the artificial character of its creation by the Soviet authorities. Particular attention should be given to the testimonies of Czechoslovak workers who were in Kyiv and reported daily deaths on the streets: «At the market-place at Kiev every night there are eight or ten bodies quickly stripped of their clothes. In the morning carts arrive and them away to be buried»²¹. Such testimonies clearly demonstrate the humanitarian catastrophe in the capital of the Ukrainian SSR.

In an analytical article, A. Baikarov exposed the Soviet propagandistic claim about a record harvest in 1933. The author explained that the harvest was uneven, and in many regions the sowing campaign had failed: «In many important districts, the area of sown land by April 30 was significantly smaller than in 1932. In many cases, taxes and ‘funds’ will take from the peasants up to 80% or even 90% of the entire harvest»²². The researcher asserted that because of this «the quantity of grain left in the villages for feeding of the peasant population will be entirely inadequate to meet the requirements», thereby confirming not only the existence of the Holodomor but also the systemic and artificial nature of the causes behind it²³. In particular, excessive taxation of the peasants and the unjustifiably inflated targets of the grain procurement campaign were among the reasons for the artificial and mass nature of the Holodomor in Ukraine. As A. Baikarov noted in his letter: «In many districts of the Ukraine... the Government was forced to grant large seed loans»²⁴. These data point to problems that often remained outside the view of tourists but were recorded in official Soviet sources at the internal level, which contributed to the spread of propagandistic claims about the country’s overall prosperity during that period. Thus, this group of sources is distinguished by a high degree of detail, geographical specificity, and a variety of evidentiary methods — from eyewitness testimonies to statistical calculations and the refutation of official information — which lends them credibility.

The materials that confirm the facts of the Holodomor of 1932–1933 in Ukraine, and those that deny it, are characterized not only by content differences but also by fundamentally different approaches. In the case of authors who confirmed the fact of the Holodomor, a strategy of testimony prevailed: appeal to the experiences of victims, eyewitnesses, relatives, and refugees. These texts present factual information that includes geographical names, objective indicators, quotations from eyewitness accounts, as well as references to additional sources, which enables comparative analysis and verification of the content of the reports. The events described in these materials concern mass mortality, significant population decline in specific villages, and the neglected condition of residents in cities — particularly in Kyiv.

The comparison of publications that denied the Holodomor in Ukraine with those that confirmed it requires not only content analysis but also a critical assessment of the source nature of these testimonies. A key factor that undermines the credibility of propagandistic publications is the lack of access their authors had to information unfiltered by the Soviet authorities. Most of the letters denying the Holodomor were written following organized trips to the USSR, during which

19 Gibson, L. (1933). The harvest in Russia. Cases of starvation. Manchester Guardian, Wed, Sep 13, P. 18.

20 Там само, С. 18.

21 Там само, С. 18.

22 Baikarov, A. V. (1933). The harvest in Russia. Some adverse factors. Manchester Guardian, Tue, Sep 19, P. 18.

23 Там само, С. 18.

24 Там само, С. 18.

foreign observers were allowed to travel only along designated routes, interact with pre-selected interlocutors, and receive information pre-approved by Soviet officials. This format of visitation effectively excluded the possibility of verifying information or communicating with the population beyond the limits of the official scenario.

The second critical limitation is that the testimonies of these authors are not only unsupported by independent sources but often contradict documented facts. For instance, claims about record harvests and economic improvement stand in contrast to official Soviet statistical reports, which—although not publicly released in 1933—later confirmed a significant reduction in sown areas, an acute food shortage, and the need for emergency internal subsidies.

A third aspect is the absence in such materials of any element of comparison or contextualization. None of the authors who denied the Holodomor engaged in an analysis of agricultural trends in previous years, nor did they correlate what they observed with the consequences of collectivization or grain procurement policies. All evaluations are presented as fragmentary judgments based on limited experience, without any attempt to verify or consider alternative perspectives.

The assessment of the reliability of the «Manchester Guardian» publications becomes more convincing when placed in the context of other English-language sources of the time. Facts similar to those presented in the letters about the Holodomor were confirmed in publications of newspapers such as «The Times», «The Daily Express», «The New York Evening Post», and «Chicago Daily News», as well as in the reports of journalists M. Muggeridge and G. Jones. The consistency of testimonies from various sources allows the truthful publications of the «Manchester Guardian» to be viewed as part of a broader body of independent journalism.

Some authors — such as S. Eddy or J. Beauchamp — demonstrate not only trust in Soviet claims but also political or ideological sympathy for the regime itself. This type of engagement diminishes the value of the source not because of bias per se, but due to the absence of any effort to recognize or minimize it. In none of the letters or articles from this group is there any sign of an attempt to acknowledge the ambiguity of the situation, to question the information received, or to admit the possible limitations of one's own experience. All statements are presented as unequivocal conclusions. The lack of doubt and the categorical nature of such judgments — in the context of a complex, multifactor humanitarian crisis — may indicate a pre-formed position rather than one resulting from independent observation.

Conclusions

The publications in the «Manchester Guardian» from September 1933 provide a unique opportunity to reconstruct not only the discussion surrounding the Holodomor of 1932–1933 in Ukraine, but also the mechanisms by which Western opinion was formed regarding events taking place behind the «Iron Curtain» — long before its official emergence. Two clear approaches can be traced in the newspaper materials: representatives of the first insisted on the truth about mass mortality, depopulated villages, cannibalism, and catastrophic living conditions; those of the second categorically denied this, relying on their personal travel experiences, official statements from Soviet authorities, or a belief in the positive changes in the USSR.

Summing up the analysis of the September selection of publications in the «Manchester Guardian», we assert that the collected body of sources reflected a profound divergence in the perception of the Holodomor in Ukraine in the autumn of 1933. On the one hand, the available eyewitness testimonies conveying local experiences — documented in the form of letters, interviews, statistical data, and reports on specific settlements — made it possible to reconstruct the real humanitarian catastrophe. On the other hand, a number of publications demonstrated complete or partial distrust of such testimonies, arguing their position by citing the absence of signs of famine in urban environments or referring to their own positive experiences of travel to the USSR.

This comparison of sources makes it possible to trace not only the competition of interpretations but also to shape a modern understanding of how representations of Soviet reality were formed in the British public space. From a historical perspective, these materials constitute important evidence of how, under conditions of limited access to reliable information and amid the active efforts of Soviet

propaganda, the Western discourse on events in Ukraine took shape. They also demonstrate that the process of understanding the scale and causes of the Holodomor was lengthy and depended not only on facts, but also on the willingness of individual journalists, political and public figures, and readers to accept information that contradicted official ideological narratives.

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