Demographics, Inequality and Entitlements in the Russian Famine of 1891

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INTRODUCTION

- The Russian famine of 1891-92 has traditionally been explained as a Malthusian crisis of rural overpopulation faced with a climate-induced crop failure in the Central/Eastern Agricultural region (Hamburg, Slavic Review 37(3) 1978:485; Shamin, Russia as a "Developing Society", Yale Univ. Press, 1985:141; Vasudhevani, Historical Journal 31(1) 1988:212).
- In contrast, Russian grain records for 1881 show that the ratio of sales to production had increased by 17% for export wheat and 10% for domestic rye above the 1885-1900 average, leaving 3 million puds more rye available for domestic consumption (Gregory, PR. Russian National Income, 1885-1913, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982: 238).
- Labor migration from rural provinces throughout Russia to factories in the Central Industrial region increased by 384% between 1861-1890. This migration served to supplement agricultural income but was highly variable between regions (Burds, J. Peasant Dreams and Market Politics, Univ. Pittsburgh Press, 1998:22-23).
- To address this, I examined the regional mortality, migration, and wage rates in Late Imperial Russia before and during the famine for evidence of an entitlement failure (Sen, A. Poverty and Famines, Oxford Univ. Press, 1981).

MIGRATION by REGION

- Figure 1. Present labour migration as a proportion of village population. * P<0.05 vs Southern and Central/Eastern Agricultural Regions; † P<0.01 vs Southern Agricultural Region.
- Figure 2. Median population in three regions. Dashed line represents median population from figures above. Source: Burds, J. Peasant Dreams and Market Politics, Univ. Pittsburgh Press, 1998:22-23.

MORTALITY by REGION

- Figure 3. Linear regression of percentage increase in provincial death rate during the famine of 1891 with average migration rate by population. * P<0.05 vs Southern and Central/Eastern Agricultural Regions; † P<0.01 vs Central/Eastern Agricultural Region.
- Figure 4. Wheat production regional specialization between Southern Agricultural and Central/Eastern Agricultural regions.

ENTITLEMENTS

- Figure 5. Rye net sales and price, 1885-1896. Source: Gregory, PR. Russian National Income, 1885-1913, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982:238.

LABOR MIGRATION and FAMINE MORTALITY


SUMMARY and CONCLUSIONS

- Population was not a significant factor in the variance between mortality rates in Russia’s three regions.
- Labor migration rate was negatively correlated with percent of increase in death rate for all twelve Russian provinces affected by the famine.
- The Central/Eastern Agricultural region had the most provinces affected by famine conditions and had the lowest labor migration rate overall.
- These findings indicate that labor migration was negatively correlated with famine mortality and positively correlated with the Central Industrial region’s overall improved mortality rate compared to the Central/Eastern Agricultural region.
- The Southern Agricultural region was not significantly impacted by the famine and had a lower mortality rate than the Central/Eastern Agricultural region. A regional specialization in export wheat resulted in no significant reduction in maximum food entitlement.
- The Central/Eastern Agricultural region maintained a lower maximum food entitlement than both other regions.