

German war crimes

80th anniversary of the siege of Leningrad – 1,1 million dead

by German Foreign Policy*

(Edit. CH-S) The human cost and the horror the German war of aggression of 1941 meant for the Russian civilian population is quickly forgotten in our days. Today, once more the enemy is officially called Russia.

The mass killing of the civilian population of Leningrad (St. Petersburg) by a starvation blockade, which was calculated ice-cold by the German political leadership at the time, was one of the sad highlights of German “master race” behaviour.

Yet once again, attempts are being made to create an enemy image of Russia and to portray the people and their political leadership as “primitive”. Has German policymakers learnt nothing from history? Where are the peace efforts? Where are the steps towards moderation?

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Even today, survivors of the German starvation blockade of Leningrad during the Second World War are still demanding compensation. The German government continues to reject this even 80 years after the blockade.

With the 80th anniversary of breaking the German blockade of Leningrad in the Second World War approaching on 27 January, survivors are once again pressing for at least a small amount of compensation. Over a period of almost 900 days between 1941 and 1944, the Wehrmacht cut off food supplies to the three million inhabitants of the Soviet metropolis. The aim was to murder the entire city population through starvation; on the 60th anniversary of the breaking the blockade, the historian *Jörg Ganzenmüller* spoke of “genocide through sheer inaction”. As many as 1.1 million people perished.

So far, only Jewish victims have received compensation; Berlin awarded them a one-off pay-



Centralised makeshift feeding of children during the hunger blockade. (Picture gk)

ment of exactly 2556 euros in 2008. Non-Jewish survivors are now also demanding this sum. In fact, the plan to kill Leningrad’s population was explicitly aimed at the non-Jewish inhabitants, who were defamed as Slavic “sub-humans”. The German government explicitly categorised the German starvation genocide as a “general act of war” for which no compensation was to be paid.

Deadly blockade

On 8 September 1941, the Wehrmacht completely encircled Leningrad, meaning that the large city, which was home to around three million people at the time, was cut off from all supplies by German troops in the south. In the north, this was carried out by the armed forces of Finland, which was allied with the Nazi Reich. Occasionally and at great risk a small amount of food and other supplies could be brought into the city via Lake Ladoga in the east. However, the quantities were not nearly enough to feed the population.

Immediately after the blockade was imposed, the Wehrmacht began to bomb food stores and other supply facilities. After just a few weeks, there was a dramatic shortage of food and energy supplies. Deadly hunger spread and the icy cold also cost many lives. Several times Soviet offensives failed to liberate Leningrad. It was not until 27 January 1944 that the Red Army suc-

* The news material of «Information on German foreign policy» (german-foreign-policy.com) can be found in publicly available sources, from reports by correspondents as well as analyses by associated scientists studying single aspects of the spectrum of German foreign policy. E-Mail: info@german-foreign-policy.com

ceeded in breaking the blockade. In the almost 900 days that Leningrad was encircled by German troops, up to 1.1 million people perished. Most of them starved to death or froze to death.

Mass murder by “sheer inaction”

Their deaths of starvation were deliberate on the part of the German Reich. On 9 July 1941, Joseph Goebbels noted that *Adolf Hitler* “intended to have cities like Moscow and Petersburg wiped out”; this was “necessary”, “because if we want to split Russia into its individual components”, then it would “no longer have a spiritual, political or economic centre”.¹ In September 1941, Reich Marshal *Hermann Göring* advised not to conquer Leningrad “for economic reasons”: According to the Berlin plans, the Soviet Union’s food was to benefit the Wehrmacht and not the Soviet population.

But on 29 September 1941 Hitler declared “there is no interest on our part in the preservation of even a part of this metropolitan population in this war of existence”; a possible surrender of the city had to be “rejected, since the problem of the population’s whereabouts and nutrition cannot be solved by us”.² The population of Leningrad was – no different to millions of Soviet prisoners of war – left to starve to death. Some 20 years ago, the historian Jörg Ganzenmüller wrote about this form of mass murder, which was inexpensive for Berlin, that it was a case of “genocide through sheer inaction”.³

Meeting centre instead of compensation

The survivors of the genocidal blockade have never received adequate compensation from the Federal Republic of Germany, the legal successor to the German Reich. In 2008, only Jewish survivors were given the option of receiving a one-time payment as compensation. According to the Federal Foreign Office, this amounted to 2556 euros.⁴

In 2021, 80 years after the start of the blockade, the *Jewish Claims Conference* succeeded in obtaining a commitment from the Federal Republic of Germany for a pension programme for around 6500 Jewish victims of National Socialism, from which Jewish survivors of the blockade can also benefit in principle. The programme involves monthly payments of 375 euros.⁵ To this day, non-Jewish survivors have been left empty-handed. The Berlin plan to



Despite all efforts – over a million people died of starvation. (Picture gk)

exterminate the population of Leningrad by starvation was explicitly aimed at all inhabitants, including the non-Jewish section of the population who were racially attacked as Slavic “subhumans”.⁶ In 2019, to mark the 75th anniversary of the breaking of the blockade, the Federal Foreign Office made twelve million euros available to modernise a hospital for war veterans and to finance the establishing of a German-Russian meeting centre. In Berlin, this is seen as a voluntary contribution that does not commit to any further payments.

“General act of war”

In particular, the German government rejects the payment of individual compensation to non-Jewish citizens of the former Soviet Union or present-day Russia as a matter of principle. “Damages that [...] result from ‘general acts of war’ fall under general international law and are not regulated by individual compensation, but by reparation agreements from state to state”, the German government declared in the Bundestag in 2017.⁷ Accordingly, Berlin categorises the plan to completely abandon a metropolis of three million people to starvation as a “general act of war”. The former Soviet Union had “collected a

considerable amount of reparation and waived further German reparations payments in August 1953”, it continued. However, a “state that has received reparations” is itself responsible for “compensating for the individual damage on its territory”. In 2017, the German government summarised that “from the perspective of legal compensation payments”, “the issue in German-Russian relations [...] is closed”. It merely conceded that “the memory must continue to be kept alive”. With its so-called remembrance policy, the Federal Republic regularly stages itself in a PR-effective manner as an ostensibly purified state, while at the same time leaving the victims empty-handed.⁸

The survivors

With the 80th anniversary of the breaking of the blockade just over two weeks away, the last survivors have now spoken out. “There are now fewer than sixty thousands of us, all people of different nationalities, who survived the horrors of the besieged city” they wrote in an open letter to the German government.⁹ The survivors “strongly condemn” Berlin’s refusal to extend the – already meagre – compensation “to all victims of the blockade still alive today, regardless of their ethnicity”. After all, the German starvation plans had not provided for “any exceptions based on nationality”. The open letter states: “We appeal to the German government not to delay the only correct decision and to extend hu-

manitarian payments to all blockade survivors without exception, of whom there are fewer and fewer.” According to the survivors, even the modernisation of the hospital for war veterans advertised by Berlin as a “humanitarian gesture” has “still not been realised”.

Source: <https://www.german-foreign-policy.com/news/detail/9450>, 11 January 2024

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¹ Elke Fröhlich (Publ.). *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels. Im Auftrag des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte und mit Unterstützung des Staatlichen Archivdienstes Russlands. Teil II: Diktate 1941–1945. Volume 1: Juli - September 1941.* München/New Providence/London/Paris 1996. p. 33.

^{2,3} Jörg Ganzenmüller. *Ein stiller Völkermord.* <https://www.dhm.de>, 15 January 2004

See also book review: Wigbert Benz. *Der Hungerplan im «Unternehmen Barbarossa» 1941*

⁴ *Explanations of the Federal Foreign Office in a government press conference* on 11 October 2021

⁵ *Aid for survivors.* <https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de>, 6 October 2021

⁶ «Der Untermensch». <https://www.dhm.de>

⁷ *Russia wants money for non-Jewish victims.* <https://www.dhm.de>, 30 December 2023

⁸ See also *Deutsche Erinnerungskultur*, <https://www.german-foreign-policy.com/news/detail/9067> and <https://www.german-foreign-policy.com/news/detail/9352>

⁹ *Compensation now!* <https://www.unsere-zeit.de>, October 2023