

# Highland Rebels: The North Caucasus During the Stalinist Collectivization Campaign

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## Abstract

This article investigates one of the most tragic episodes of Soviet history: the collectivization campaign of 1929–30, when the Soviet state's brutal assault on the peasantry plunged the whole country into chaos and provoked large scale rebellions. Resistance was especially fierce in the Muslim dominated parts of the North Caucasus, a notoriously troubled region where Soviet structures were still very weak, and the social cohesion of mountain communities strong. Ultimately, the Red Army and the armed forces of the secret police crushed these rebellions ruthlessly. Yet in Chechnya, Ingushetia, Karachai and parts of Dagestan, they were at least sufficiently violent for the Soviet leadership to decide to suspend their collectivization attempt altogether until the mid-1930s. This is the first study to analyse collectivization in the non-Russian areas of the North Caucasus based on material from Russian archives as well as published document collections containing Soviet secret police reports.

## Keywords

Chechnya, collectivization, North Caucasus, Soviet Union, Stalinism, violence

In mid-November of 1929, the Bolshevik leadership approved the program of 'total collectivization' (*sploshchnaia kollektivizatsia*). This marked the beginning of the state's frontal assault on the agrarian economic system and way of life across the entire country. The village in its traditional form was to be abolished. The village assemblies with their councils of elders were banned. Peasants were to become proletarians, to be drafted en masse for work in the kolkhoz, the collective farm. At the

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...the conditions were different from region to region. Not only was it necessary to distinguish between Russian and non-Russian settlement areas, but differentiation was also required between the individual national regions of the North Caucasus. On the occasion of the Third Plenary Session of the North Caucasian Regional Committee on 17 January 1930, Rudakov stated that conditions in North Ossetia, for instance, were more comparable to those in the Russian-settled Kuban region of the North Caucasus than with those in Chechnya, Ingushetia, Karachai or Kabardia, where geographical, agricultural circumstances based on clan and party tribal ties, as well as strong indigenous traditions prevailed.<sup>17</sup> Any collectivization that had to be achieved by Red Army troops and the deployment of 'brigades consisting of non-Russian comrades' was unrealistic, this should be the task of national party cadres, which were, however, lacking in Chechnya and other national regions, as Rudakov noted. Instead of pushing for total collectivization, Rudakov urged the comrades in Chechnya to 'wait a little' and first create the necessary preconditions for collectivization. He stressed that they would not be embarrassed for lagging slightly behind in collectivization.<sup>18</sup> The latter point must have resonated particularly strongly in the Chechen delegates present at the session. For after the spring of 1929 when the entire Chechen party leadership had been replaced...

...in calling for a more cautious approach to collectivization, Rudakov was by no means arguing for leniency or democracy. Rather, he called for a determined fight against the kulaks!

...in the national regions of the North Caucasus, there are just as many kulaks as in the Russian districts. This makes their task no less difficult than elsewhere. The most important thing is finding the right balance in begin with collectivization, and I would not, comrades, like our party representatives there to wait and leave the kulaks...

Rudakov's appeal did not come without effect. As in other parts of the country, the party leadership in Chechnya was intent on resolving the issues of collectivization and dekulakization with a single strike in order to prevent Chechnya from falling behind other areas in the statistics. Soon after the official collectivization campaign had begun, the Chechen government reported impressive figures: In February 1930, according to these figures, the districts of Shalinskii and Gudermesskii had already reached collectivization levels of 97 and 83 per cent, respectively. Two weeks later, it was even reported that collectivization in these two districts had been completed altogether, with the Shalinskii district having more...

17. *Известия ЦК РКП(б)*, 1930, № 1, с. 27.  
18. *Известия ЦК РКП(б)*, 1930, № 1, с. 27.  
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