

The "Polish Operation" of the NKVD

<https://operacja-polska.pl/nke/about-polish-operation/information/799>About-the-Polish-Operation.html>
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About the “Polish Operation”

The “Polish Operation” carried out by the NKVD during the Great Terror in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was indubitably one of the greatest atrocities – with the characteristics of genocide – in the history of 20th century Europe.

Under order No. 00485 issued on 11 August 1937 by the People’s Commissar for Internal Affairs of the USSR Nikolai Yezhov not fewer than 139,835 people were targeted, including 111,091 who were murdered, in most cases with a shot to the back of the head, due to their membership of the Polish Military Organisation (POW), which allegedly carried out espionage and subversion for the benefit of Poland. The vast majority of the victims of the “Polish Operation” committed by the NKVD were Poles, but the victims also included Russians, Ukrainians, Belarussians, Jews and members of other nationalities and ethnic groups living in the USSR. In addition, under Order No. 00486 of 15 August 1937, also issued by Nikolai Yezhov, the wives and children of the convicted “traitors to the Motherland” were also subjected to oppression.

During the Great Terror, Poles living in the USSR also fell victim to the bloody purge that Stalin conducted in the Red Army, the security service, and the party apparatus. Yet it was the mass-scale operations targeting, for example, the “unwanted nations” that resulted in the Bolshevik terror being remembered as “great”. Operations against specific nations affected Germans, Poles, Latvians, Estonians, Greeks, Koreans, Fins, Chinese, and other nationalities who lived in the USSR.

The operation carried out by the NKVD against the Poles was stood out in terms of its scale and cruelty. For every Soviet citizen killed, 40 Poles were slaughtered. It is estimated that at least 200,000 of our fellow Poles lost their lives during the Great Terror.

Despite the enormous scale of the atrocities, the “Polish Operation” conducted by the NKVD between 1937–1938 is shrouded by general ignorance. This motif did not appear in literature, film, theatre, music, etc. Neither has information on the massacre been included in school curricula, and the academic literature on the issue is scarce for a phenomenon of

such a grand scale. In the time of the Polish People's Republic, the topic of the terror of the 1930s was condensed to the "period of Stalinist errors and aberrations" whose victims were members of the Communist Party of Poland. On the other hand, the Western memory identifies the Great Terror exclusively with the show-trials of high-ranking Bolshevik leaders.

Measures taken by the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding and the Institute of National Remembrance, including the development of a popular history web portal wholly devoted to the topic of the "Polish Operation" carried out by the NKVD between 1938-1938 aims to change this state of affairs and contribute to restoring these atrocities against the Polish nation to its rightful place in popular consciousness and memory.

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