

No. 158/264

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[Handwritten note in top left corner in black ink: *Forward to V.Maniak. - Donbas-*]

To: Union of Writers of Ukraine

Kyiv

I heard an announcement on Ukrainian radio on September 9, 1988, that the Union of Writers of Ukraine was appealing to all those who lived through the great famine of 1933 to share their memories of that terrible famine.

In 1933 I was ten years old and I remember very well the events of that time. It is impossible to forget such things. Because I lived through them myself. I was also swollen [from hunger] like many, many others. I survived only because I was young.

I will describe several examples of the devious, well disguised, artificially conducted famine.

I was born and lived at that time in the village of Baidivka, Starobilsk Raion, Voroshylovhrad Oblast (then called Luhansk Oblast).

My father, Fedir Akymovych Kutsenko, and all his forebears were peasants, and my mother, Yevdokiia Matviyivna Kutsenko, before her marriage worked as a servant in the city of Rostov, cooking and caring for children in a physician's family, and later performed the same work in the city of Artemivsk in Donetsk Oblast (I forget the old name of Artemivsk¹).

¹ Prior to 1924 and since 2016 - Bakhmut.

In 1932, grain taxes were collected. My father paid two taxes in grain, but could not pay the third. Everything he had, including the house and outbuildings, was inventoried and sold, and our family of six was kicked out. The family was left homeless and without any means of livelihood. My father, older sister Lusha, and younger brother Petia died of hunger, and my older brother Sava went to the Donbas region (Lysychansk) to work in a mine. Mother and I lived in a neighbour's house in which a family had all died of starvation. In 1934,² my older brother Sava took me with him to Lysychansk, and my mother was taken by her daughter (and my sister) Halyna. As you can see, the family broke up.

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The house in which we lived in cold and hunger (I was also swollen from hunger) stood at the edge of the village. Next to the house lay a dirt road along which the peasants drove to their fields. It was very cold and there were big snow drifts.

As I remember today, (my eyes are filled with fear even now), I would blow a clearing in the frosted windows and see children, old women, and old men being driven in carts drawn by oxen, with younger people walking behind the carts. People, children, and old people crying and shouting for help. But no one could help them. Then they shouted, "Goodbye, dear neighbors." These were people who were subject, according to unwritten laws, to deportation. They were accompanied by some men on horseback and male fellow villagers.

Those male fellow villagers who mismanaged their gardens and fields (if they had any) were drunkards and slackers. They referred to themselves as "poor peasants" (*bidniaky*).

The people [in the carts] were driven to what the locals called Oranda (and later, the Urals). This place was located 20 km from the village. It was called Soldatske. It was said that in the days when soldiers served for 25 years, their barracks stood there. There are steep ravines on this land and no settlements nearby.

² Further down in this testimony, the author dates his examples to 1934, which do not fall into the dates of the famine of 1932-1933. The next few paragraphs do apply to 1933, but the recollections from Lysychansk are dated 1934, after the famine had supposedly ended. It is unclear whether it is intentional or a mistake.

Reportedly, the people who were brought there were abandoned in the ravine on the snow-covered drifts. Those who had managed to bring a shovel and crowbar with them, dug a hole where they could escape the cold, while others froze.

In the village, people were swollen from hunger, unable to walk, they died singly and in families.

To save themselves, they ate dogs and cats; it came to the point that people ate people.

They ate cakes baked of chaff, sawdust, and crushed hay (*matorzhenyky*).

In 1934 my brother Sava took me to Lysychansk in Voroshylovhrad Oblast (formerly Luhansk Oblast), and my mother was taken in by her daughter Halyna, who

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lived in the same village.

At that time my brother Sava worked at the Voikov mine. We lived in a mud hut in the station village.

Nearby was the Rukhymovych mine (later renamed 2-3-2). A narrow-gauge railway ran from this mine, along which coal was transported to the loading dock located at the Lysychansk railway station. This coal was loaded onto railway cars.

Several times I saw the cars being loaded with sacks of flour instead of coal. These cars were driven up to a steep cliff, the sacks of flour were unloaded and thrown into the ravine, then doused with kerosene and burned. We—just kids at the time—pounced on the burning sacks of flour, tried to extinguish them, and dragged them further down to the stream to get some flour.

And once they brought some wooden barrels with wooden hoops to the edge of the cliff. They began to throw them over the cliff into the ravine. The barrels rolled rumbling and crashing down to the bottom where they broke and fish, called salted (bream), with cut open backs, flew in all directions. They then poured kerosene over them and burned them. When we boys rushed to gather the fish that had not had time to burn, some guys in leather jackets and leather caps, wearing bandoliers, drove us

away shouting “don’t touch the fish, it’s poisoned.” But we ate it and no one was poisoned.

At the Voikov mine in Lysychansk there was a canteen where the miners ate before descending into the mine and [after] ascending to the surface. In this canteen they cooked cream of wheat and before the miners went down into the mine they threw [any remaining] porridge into the sewer well. They said that the porridge was poisoned. The flowing fecal water carried the porridge away. So we boys went down into these

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wells and licked the porridge left on the walls of the well.

This is how an artificial famine was created, which, with its bony hand, destroyed many, many thousands of innocent people.

This is how they took away grain from the villages, took it to the city, and there did with it as I described above.

Fellow writers, forgive me for my frankness, but this is true

I am writing about what I remember and somehow I feel uneasy, [I feel] ashamed and sad remembering this, but it is true.

You yourselves know what would have happened for sharing these memories during the Stalin era and the time of stagnation, but in the days of glasnost, democracy, and truth, we need not remain silent. Let our descendants know everything that our people experienced, let history know!

Respectfully yours.

A participant of the Second World War, now a pensioner, member of the CPSU since May 1945.

Yakiv Fedorovych Kutsenko living at:

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[Signature]

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