

FRAGMENTS FROM K. PETRUS'S CORRESPONDENCE "SOVIET ARRESTEES" , 1944–1947

Alokhin, Engineer

The special NKVD collegium met behind closed doors. Seated at a red table were Peterson, the head; to his right and left were two members of the collegium, one in a military uniform and the other in civilian clothing.

The defendant, an elderly engineer, sixty years old, was accused of collecting and recording in a copybook all kinds of anti-Soviet jokes, expressions, ditties, and parodies of various revolutionary hymns and songs when he was a foreman during the construction of a bridge in Sochi, and then reading them within a close circle of his assistants, and this entailed the risk of punishment foreseen by Article 58, Point 10 of the Criminal Code: from six months [imprisonment] to capital punishment.

"Defendant Alokhin, this is your notebook with stories and jokes?" Peterson asked severely, looking straight at him.

"Yes, it's mine," the old man replied calmly with a barely visible smile on his face. "I already said this during the investigation."

Peterson: "Where did you get this kulak ditty?" (Reads):

When Lenin was dying,

He ordered Stalin

Not to give us bread,

Nor show us any fatback!

Alokhin: "I heard drunken collective farm members singing it."

Peterson (Peterson leafs through the copybook, pauses at a certain page and reads a parody of the "Internationale"):

Arise, ye who are oppressed by the commune.

The entire world of starving people and slaves,

Our mind, indignant, is aboil,

Let's march on Kyiv to kill the enemies.

.....

Only we, the workers of the universal,

Great army of labour,

Have the right to own the earth,

But the harvest—never...

“But this is undiluted, out and out counterrevolution! For such matters we simply smack [people]!”

Alokhin: “There I recorded everything heard on the street, on the assumption that ‘the voice of the people is the voice of God.’”

Peterson (coughs, then turns another page of the notebook, and turning toward the member of the collegium in the military uniform, reads in an undertone):

We’ve even caught up with the devils,

And are crawling into the grave ourselves,

And with tickets, to boot...

Who’s the last one [in line]? I’m right behind you!

The member of the collegium wearing the military uniform: “Citizen Alokhin, for what purpose were you collecting all this filth about Soviet power?”

Alekhin: “Well... for love of art... I was interested in Soviet folklore... This is noted down in my investigation materials...”

Peterson (continues reading, mutilating the Ukrainian words):

An old woman sits on a sackcloth

Counting up the workdays!

A workday here, a workday there,

And a fifth day without bread...

“And where did you get this?”

Alokhin: “Children were singing this on the streets of Rostov...”

Peterson (continues reading and leafing through the notebook):

“A drunk citizen is walking on the street hiccupping and burping loudly.

'What's wrong with him?' a young passerby asks an old man.

'The man is gagging from Soviet "happiness!" the old man replied.'

(He leafs through the notebook and, frowning, continues to read):

"A scene in court... 'Witness Zemliakov, what do you know about Citizen Nefedov's lawsuit?'

'Citizen Judge, their cow wandered into Nefedov's garden and organized wholesale collectivization in it.'

'Witness, enough, enough, everything is clear.'"

Peterson: Out and out, utter counterrevolution. Discreditation of the Soviet court. Kulak criticism of collectivization... (He continues leafing through the notebook, stops at a certain page, and first reads to himself and then out loud, pausing between individual entries): "I am approached by a person dressed entirely in rags, grubby, with uncombed hair, with a strong odour of all kinds of Soviet atmospheres... Well, one can say that the fellow has reached not only socialism but communism as well."

"That a person can be descended from a monkey has not been proved, and this contradicts scientific truth. But that a person can turn into a monkey is so obvious that it does not require any proof, especially in the USSR."

"Comrades, 'life has become better, life is merrier.'" This is reflected particularly fully in the draft of the next Five Year Plan":

Solar heating,

Lunar lighting,

Nutrition by correspondence,

And the silence of the grave.

The other member of the collegium: "And where did you get this counterrevolution?" Alokhin: "I collected it from various sources."

Member of the collegium wearing the military uniform: "And you made all these 83 entries on the bridge construction site?"

Alokhin (interrupts): "Not everything went into this notebook: one joke is not recorded... People say that its author is Karl Radek himself."

Peterson (laying the notebook aside): "Well, well, what's this joke? Tell it to the judge. May as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb."

Alokhin (uncertainly): "Maybe it's not worth..."

Peterson (smiling): "Speak, counterrevolution!"

Alokhin (embarrassed): "It's about how a valet in a Geneva hotel woke Litvinov up."

The second member of the collegium: "So how did he wake him?"

Alokhin: "Litvinov asked to be woken up early in the morning. The valet came to the door and thinks: 'How am I supposed to wake him? Call him comrade? What kind of comrade am I to him, a minister? Calling him mister is not done in their country; he might even be offended. Calling him citizen is not suitable either. Camerade is somehow not right either. So, how do I wake him up? I thought and thought and then decided to address him in Russian with the first words of the 'Internationale': 'Arise ye workers from your slumbers...'"

Peterson (coughs, wrinkling his forehead, interrupts Alokhin and asks him harshly): "Citizen Alokhin, do you acknowledge that you are guilty of the accusation against you? All the evidence is at hand!"

Alokhin: "No, I do not."

Peterson: "Is that your final word?"

Alokhin: "You will not shoot me anyway, and I am already prepared for a ten-year sentence...Engineers will be useful 'there' too. That's all."

Peterson: "Everything is clear and understandable to the court."

Five minutes later a verdict prepared in advance was brought from the session room:

"...For counterrevolutionary agitation among the workers on the construction of the Sochi bridge, punish engineer Alokhin, I. P. with imprisonment for ten years with the attendant deprivation of rights for five years..."

The old man was brought back to cell no. 33, from where he had been taken to court, only at lunchtime.

Alokhin chewed very slowly and the entire time he smiled unnaturally, recounting his conversations with the judges.

"It turned out that they were not trying you but you them," concluded someone in the cell who was listening to his account.

"But be aware, father," added a convict, who had been silent until then, "that when you end up in general labor, horrific servitude awaits you in the far north, with snowstorms, minus-50 degrees, cold and gloomy barracks, and food corresponding to your production. You will melt and fade slowly, and at some point you will reach the end from a final blow from a rifle butt... Life there is

worse than being shot and more difficult than all the woes in the world... The only reason that you weren't shot is because you are an engineer and maybe they will make use of you. But, old man, in general labour you will be as good as dead straightaway and you'll have a ticket to heaven, he-he-he!"

"I don't care," replied engineer Alokhin, and he began arranging his belongings.

## Cannibals

Yes, yes, this was in 1932–33, the years of "Stalin's happy era."

This happened in Ukraine, in the Kuban, in Terek oblast, among the Kalmyks, in Turkestan, and other oblasts of the Soviet land.

It happened at a time when the Soviet Union was throwing onto the world market, at dumping prices, billions of pounds of grain, fish, meat, dairy products, vegetables, naphtha, fuel, matches, forestry products, and manufactured goods.

This was when wonderful grain crops sprang up in our native fields, but all-out collectivization either let them rot in the fields or sucked them out from the peasants in order to supply countries abroad. And Soviet grain growers began to starve. Tens of millions of peasants, who earlier had fed both themselves and millions of other people, were left without grain.

The famine began in Ukraine.

When the last kilograms of grain, garden produce, and root vegetables were forcibly taken from the peasants, they began to eat oak bark, acorns, and the roots of all sorts of plants. All cats, dogs, and small domestic animals were consumed. The more agile part of the population rushed to various corners of the country in search of bread. Trains packed to the rafters with starving people headed for the big cities and industrial centers, where the food balance was maintained by the policy of "facing toward the city." The grain-producing oblasts of the country, which earlier had fed all the large cities, were now seeking salvation there from death by starvation. Despite the GPU barrier detachments, however, many people succeeded in reaching the capital and labour centers, where they gave away their last items of clothing, footwear, and valuables for kilograms of bread. On the way back they encountered GPU men, who confiscated this last scrap of bread. In despair, people threw themselves under trains, hanged themselves, drowned themselves, or died slowly at remote substations, with no energy left to make it home.

The other part of Ukraine's starving population rushed to the south and the east: to the Kuban, the Caucasus, the Trans-Volga region, and Turkestan. But here, too, they failed to find salvation because Moscow was getting ready to strike a blow even at these oblasts, which brought the same kind of artificial famine to the latter in the following year, 1933. The population that remained in local areas, having consumed everything that was edible, began to swell up,

sicken, and die; at first, one by one people who were less hardy, then the rest: thousands, millions of them...

The black wings of death hovered over every large village, and there was not a single corner in Ukraine where the terrible famine was not raging. People began feeding on carrion and human corpses. Acts of cannibalism stemmed from the consumption of corpses/Від пожирання трупів перейшли людожерства./ In many locales, mothers who had gone insane from the horror ate their own or strangers' children.

The GPU uncovered large gangs of cannibals, who caught their victims and even sold meat products made from human flesh. Male cannibals were shot, while female cannibals were sent to the Solovetsky Islands.

The spring months, March, April, May, before the grass came up and the first root plants, vegetables, and berries emerged, were especially difficult. Scattered along roads, paths, and canals were the remains of unfortunate people gnawed by people or animals in the field... Some large villages lost 50–70 percent of their population.

Thousands of the dead lay in their houses and yards without burial because there was no one to bury them. Mass graves dug by the government in cemeteries could not hold all the dead. When the warm weather came, the countless corpses of unburied people began to decompose and fill the air of villages with an intolerable stench. Sanitary brigades of gravediggers composed of Red Army soldiers and Komsomol members from the cities were dispatched to localities. But even they were unable to keep up with the pace of removing the dead. Above many large villages that had completely died out, the government hung flags bearing terrible inscriptions: 'Plague quarantine. No entry.' But, in fact, no one was out and about, except for members of the government and the "sanitary brigades." Ukraine, the immense breadbasket of Europe, was dying in the terrible torments of starvation; the country was transformed into a gigantic cemetery, where millions were already lying in graves, while the rest swelled up and, driven insane, awaited their turn....

In city bazaars homeless little boys sang:

"Oh, Ukraine, our grain-producing land,

Gave up grain for tanks and is itself starving."

How many people starved to death in Ukraine? Moscow's statistics are silent about this. It even denies that a famine ever took place. Is this shameful or disgraceful? No, neither one nor the other. It is necessary to conceal [it] from the West so as not to defame "Stalin's Five Year Plans." Does it matter how many robots died—five or ten million? Did they remain in power? Yes, they did. Did they build military giants for the production of tanks, cannon, gases, planes?

Yes, they did. Did they come even closer to [achieving] world revolution, when these tanks would come in handy as a decisive force? They came close, and they're "always prepared!" And they don't give a damn how many people starved to death there. And they didn't. And they did worse. Still living skeletons throng next to Torgsins in order to trade a last silver or gold cross for a handful of goats... Unfortunates writhe in the agony of starvation before death... Corpses lie about and stink... And over this entire horror the radio broadcasts concerts, foxtrots, songs, and speeches about the achievement and overfulfilment of the plan... Death by starvation to the accompaniment of music along with figures on the achievements of the first Five-Year Plan "in four years"!!!

What is this, socialists and proletarians of all countries? What is this called in the light of even a robber's morals? In our country this is called Satanism, and in yours? "Soviet democracy," it would appear.

But this is a subject for another time. Now I will continue about the famine, about the same famine that took place in other oblasts the following year, 1933.

The Kuban.

What is the Kuban?

During the tsarist period the Kuban region could feed itself at least for three–four years with one year's harvest. This was the goldmine of the Northern Caucasus. But in 1933 the Bolsheviks turned it into a cemetery. They sucked out everything. Even wild pears that people had prepared for the winter were confiscated. For failing to complete the grain deliveries, which exceeded their reserves of grain by several times, individual homesteads and entire stanytsias [Cossack settlements—Trans.], like, for example, Poltavaska, Ust-Medvedivska, and Uriupska, were deported beyond the Urals, where nearly all of them perished. Those who were not deported began scattering every which way. But the omnipresent GPU feelers caught up with them everywhere and turned them back to...the closest prison or deported them to Siberia again. Prisons and detention buildings were filled to overflowing. Prisoners were issued between 50 and 100 grams of bread a day. Only a lucky handful of those who ended up in prison during this period survived. In the Krasnodar prison, for example, between 20 and 50 people died every day. This mortality rate existed in other prisons in this territory.

The people who were left in stanytsias and hamlets, like in Ukraine, began to eat everything that was edible: dogs, cats, rats, horses, all kinds of carrion, tree bark, dead animals, human corpses; the inhabitants of stanytsias, driven insane, began to eat everything. In mid-winter sinister rumours about cannibalism began to circulate. How terrible these rumours were! One could scarcely believe them.

In the stanytsia of Abinska a female trader slaughtered the little girl of her [female] neighbour and prepared jellied meat out of her and sold it to passengers at the railway station... She was caught red-handed and arrested. People said that the GPU may have shot her... Or perhaps she was transported to the Solovetsky Islands.

In the stanytsia of Slavianska an acquaintance of mine, a raion doctor, took part in a GPU commission to examine 18–20 arrested individuals who, in organized fashion, hunted down people and ate them. During interrogations they roared with laughter and behaved like madmen. They were shot.

Near the Liniina railway station cannibals jumped out of a small forest, grabbed passersby, and dragged them off to their lair... You would pass, as it happened, by this forest (even in the daytime) and you would look all around. It was horrible...

In the stanytsia of Akhtyraska, my good friend Alokchina, who was a member of the Khlyst sect, after getting divorced (the Khlysts do not consider this a sin), took in some people from the Kuban into her house, which consisted of a kitchen and one room. After a few days the lodgers, a man and a woman, slaughtered their landlady, stripped the flesh from her bones, and buried the skeleton and entrails in the vestibule, which they covered with all sorts of trash and strips of wood. The flesh was placed in a bucket and prepared for cooking. Early in the morning a [female] neighbour entered the house and began asking where Alokchina was. The lodgers, who had quickly covered the bucket with a cloth, replied in a confused way that the woman had gone to visit her daughter in the Kuban. The neighbour knew perfectly well that whenever Alokchina went to visit anyone, she always put on her good clothes and new slippers. But here were her clothes hanging against the wall, and the slippers were under the bed, which seemed very suspicious to her. But when she saw white meat in a bucket that had been covered carelessly by the frightened lodgers, she was seized with a horror she had never felt before. She went outside solemnly and ran to Alokchina's ex-husband so that he could take necessary measures. She told him about her suspicions and together they went to the police. The cannibals, sensing trouble, had run away in time, grabbing some of the landlady's belongings. The policeman who arrived on the scene discovered only the skeleton buried in the vestibule, along with the entrails of the unfortunate woman. The cannibals had taken the flesh with them.

In Krasnodar a prostitute invited a party member who was travelling on business to her house. During the night he was awakened by a strange wheezing coming from behind the plywood partition. The prostitute was no longer lying next to him, and there was some sort of commotion going on in the next room. Carefully and on tiptoe, he approached the half-open door and saw some unfamiliar people cutting up a human corpse. The dumbstruck party member jumped out of the window onto the street, raised a clamour, and began firing his revolver. Night watchmen and the police, who rushed to investigate the noise, surrounded the building of horror, but there was now no one in the house except for the unfortunate person who had been killed.

In the stanytsia of Troitska a brother was fixing on eating his sister, who was visiting from Rostov, but, horror-stricken, she escaped from his hands and was saved at the stanytsia soviet. The cannibal disappeared. People said later that several skeletons were found underneath the floor of his house.

In Novorosiisk, children's fingers were discovered in a purchased Delfin sausage. Similar things were said about baked pies in Krasnodar. The morning after the death of a passerby who had died on the street of exhaustion caused by starvation, his corpse had been stripped of clothing



and eaten by his starving traveling companions, who died the following day. Their bodies were also eaten.

Former Red partisans, who were close to the GPU, recounted that in the North Caucasus krai [territory] hundreds of people accused of cannibalism were arrested... As a rule, men were liquidated, and the women were sent to the Solovetsky Islands...

Cannibalism lasted until May, when grass, edible roots, fish, and all kinds of greenery appeared.

...And during this period gigantic elevators on shore in Novorosiisk and other Black Sea ports were loading wheat, corn, oil cake, peas, sunflower seed onto foreign steamships. And from refrigerators—frozen meat, poultry, bacon for export, fish, millions of eggs...

Already by 7 August 1932, a law punishing anyone who infringed on state property with a ten-year sentence was passed.

A starving woman dug up ten kilograms of potatoes out of a collective farm's abandoned vegetable garden. She was tried and sentenced to ten years. A starving teenager who worked in Novorosiisk salting fish was given a ten-year sentence for stealing a pail of anchovies (small fish).

In the stanytsia of Kushchivska members of a collective farm who were sowing spring wheat stuffed themselves with the seed grain, which had been treated [with chemicals], and dozens of them died right in the field, behind the sowing machines. The law of 7 August could no longer touch them.

After a community of evangelical Christians consisting of eighty members gave everything to the [grain] collectors, they refused to join the collective farm, and in the last stages of exhaustion from starvation they forced themselves to go to the cemetery, where, with a prayer on their lips they began to die quietly. By the third day the last martyrs were dying, their hands clutching Bibles. A sanitary brigade composed of Komsomol members from Stavropol dragged them into a mass grave only two weeks later.

Something similar took place on the Terek River, in Kalmyk oblast, in Central Asia. According to eyewitnesses, cannibalism in these oblasts cannibalism escalated to such threatening dimensions that even the GPU became alarmed. Several thousand cannibals were arrested, most males—Muslims, nearly all of whom were shot in the GPU cellars.

How many unfortunate peasants and other citizens of the USSR died as a result of the artificial Stalinist famine? No one knows the exact figure, not even the GPU and the Statistical Directorate. In any case, this figure is no less than 15 million. Later, during the investigation, when I gave the figure of 20 million victims of starvation, the investigator protested and began threatening me with all sorts of problems. I agreed to reduce them to 10–12 million; the investigator fell silent and wrote that figure in my case file. Then I thought: if the GPU is agreeing to 10–12 million, then how many unfortunate people really died?

And how many cannibals were captured and arrested, or how many cases of cannibalism were there? This is the GPU's secret.

Already in 1939, when the prisoners from "Yezhov's batch" were moved from the Solovetsky Islands to the polar region, I found out from them that all the prisoners were moved from the Solovetsky Islands, with the exception of 340 female cannibals, who were kept behind as workers at the local GPU agricultural farm.

"And what kind of animals are they, these female cannibals?" a prisoner asked the narrators.

"These were cannibals from Ukraine and the Kuban."

... Yes, yes, this happened in 1932–33...in a country that calls itself the most democratic country in the world.

On a train one day I talking to a prominent party worker with a medal on his chest. He listened placidly to my account of the horrific famine in the Kuban stanytsias, and in the tone of a vivisector-executioner he crowned my stories with the following conclusion:

"All this is out and out kulak sabotage. Of course, the enemy will resist... But the question 'Who [will overcome] whom?' does not allow for any liberalism and sentimentality... And if it becomes necessary, we will destroy 50 percent of these troglodytes (these are the peasants and workers!), but we will definitely build socialism in 'one country.'"

Later, when I recounted this episode on the train to my investigator, he said hypocritically:

"It's too bad that you don't know his surname because we would have shown him his 50 percent!"

But what does this phrase mean when this very Chekist was directing a campaign to pump grain out of the stanytsias and deport the dekulakized to Siberia and Central Asia? Moreover, he could not have been unaware of the secret resolution that was passed at the well-known meeting of leading party activists of the North Caucasus krai (1933).

During this meeting Kaganovich, the representative of the "party and the government," declared with authority that if, in order to carry out the tasks of the party and the government, it became necessary to step over the corpses of the kulaks, who are mounting resistance, then local party workers should do this.

And they did (although some of them went mad from the horror and committed suicide). And if the medal-wearing party member so blatantly sacrificed 50 percent of the "troglodytes" in the name of building socialism, then this means that he was expressing the "party's general line" completely clearly. And those were not his percentages but those of the "great and wise one."

Later, when I was being interrogated in the Rostov krai branch of the NKVD, the head of the department of religious affairs, the Chekist Parfanovych (the grandson of the bishop of

Taganrog!), asked me whether I was confirming my previous testimony about the famine in Ukraine, the Kuban, and other oblasts of the USSR. I replied: "Yes, a famine and cannibalism did indeed take place, and millions of innocent people perished. For this truth I am prepared to die." Parfanovich became embarrassed and was barely able to mutter the following:

"Yes, yes, there were such difficulties... But the Soviet power was not responsible for this..."

At the time, during those terrible years, everything was blamed on "kulak sabotage," Later, when this "lightning rod" was no longer convincing protection from the accusations of crimes committed by the Bolsheviks in 1932–33, everyone stopped talking about this famine [...]."

The Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre (Oseredok) (Winnipeg).

The "Memoir Competition" Collection, file 8, fols. 65–68, 246–53. Original. Typescript.