

Yevsey Abramovich Kotkov



This is a picture of me, Yevsey Abramovich Kotkov, in Kiev in 1936. It was the time when workers had to make speeches at meetings so they could be considered socially active and recommended to become members of the Party. I liked to speak at meetings. I liked it when they said 'And now the floor is given to comrade Kotkov' and there was applause. I soon became a member of the Party and was sent on an assignment to a village. This happened in 1933 during the famine. People were dying every day. At one point I went to the district committee and said '26 people have died.'

The official responded, 'Don't tell me how many people died. I know better than you do. I'm responsible for 36 collective farms. I don't want to hear this any more!' The life of an individual has never had any value in this country. Nobody cared about all those miserable people dying from starvation. It was not permitted to ever mention to anybody what I saw there. People dying. Children, people were dying leaving empty houses. Millions of people were in this situation. I lived with a farmer's family. My position was called 'representative,' and I was responsible for the order and establishment of the Soviet power in this village. For better or worse, I was bound to do what I was expected to do. If I hadn't done what they required, they could have sent me to the cellars where they were executing people. So I fulfilled all the requirements. It was a terrifying situation. People opposed to the Soviet power could kill me at any moment, but if I stepped out of line, those I was working for could also execute me at any moment for treason, without trial or investigation. Dorochka was very concerned for me. She came to the village and convinced me to move back to Kiev. This I did and resumed working at the plant. In Kiev, we rarely visited my parents. There was nothing to do there. My sisters and brothers had left them to have their own life, and my parents were constantly arguing. We always argued with my father. He always swore about the Soviet power and we defended it. He hated the Soviet regime, he called people ragamuffins.