

No. 177

**Letter from students of the Pechersky school Bratslavsky District  
to the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee\***

Our Dear Leaders!

We, the students of the Pechersky school, Bratslavsky District, ask for your assistance, because we are dying from starvation. We are supposed to be studying, but we can barely walk because of hunger. Whether from independent or collectivised families, we are swelling from hunger, because [as students] we cannot work, and bread is only given to those who earn workday pay.

The October holidays are soon approaching and we should be happy, but our eyes are yellowing from lack of nutrition, and our stomachs ache from the “garbage” they feed us, because not only has all the grain been taken away down to the last kernel, but also the potatoes, beans and all other food. They are using the potatoes for distilling whiskey – yet we have nothing to eat. We won’t even mention any issues with our shoes and clothing – just asking that you do not condemn us to starvation. We hope that the Soviet government will not let us die, and will not feed us bullets instead of bread, as happened to our parents under the imperial czars. We are hopeful that the Soviet government will help us, and save us from death by starvation.

Requested by students [last names]: Mylhota, Sirokha, Moskaliuk, Baran, Mahdych, Pylypenko, Antonyshyna, Vistiak, [ and 2 others whose signatures were unclear].

*\*Translation of Document #177, as it appears in the following collection of documents on collectivization and famine in Ukraine, 1929-1933, transcribed from the original handwritten letter that appeared in this Ukrainian archival source: ЦДАЖР України, ф. 1, оп. 7, спр. 145, арк. 148.*

The book is titled: Mykhaïlychenko H. M., et al. *Kolektyvizatsiia i Holod Na Ukraïni : 1929-1933 : Zbirnyk Dokumentiv i Materialiv*. 2. vyd., stereotypne. ed., Kyïv, Naukova Dumka, 1993.

It is available online here: <http://www.archives.gov.ua/Sections/Famine/Publicat/Fam-kolekt.php> on the official website of the Ukrainian National Archives.

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Notes and background:

The school was located in the province of Vynnytsia, which was in the southwestern part of Ukraine, as its borders existed in the 1930’s (the borders expanded westwards after WWII). See map here: <http://www.conflicts.rem33.com/images/Ukraine/UKR%201922-38.jpg>

Also linked from: <http://holodomorct.org/holodomor-information-links/maps-and-demography/>

A bit of background:

The students were probably between 6<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> grade.

In those days, students were expected to be fed a full midday meal at school – according to what was stated as government policy.

The letter was written in the fall of 1931; probably in September – but not dated as received by the authorities until Nov. 1. Collectivization was in full force by 1931, and it was promised that each person who worked on a collective farm was to be paid in food according to a formula known as the “workday.” In reality, once the central Soviet government collected what it wanted, little was left for the farmers, and many did not get their payment in “bread” at all, or in much lesser amounts. However, in season, the farmers were given some sort of meal – usually soup with a few vegetables – during the day. As food grew scarce, it was quite common for the soup to be watered down and the bread to contain inedible “fillers” such as sawdust - when served both at the collectives and the schools.(Hence the comment of the food being “garbage.”)

Since the students didn’t have enough to eat at school, and had very little at home, they began to show signs of starvation – extreme hunger, lethargy, and often swelling.

Although the worst of the famine, the Holodomor, occurred in 1932-33, there were major episodes of acute starvation and death beginning as early as 1929 onwards.