



# **Victims of Stalinism and the Soviet Secret Police: The Comparability and Reliability of the Archival Data—Not the Last Word**

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CONQUEST'S COMMENT ON MY LAST ARTICLE in this journal<sup>1</sup> raises some important questions for our profession. Are we going to progress in our level of understanding? Are we going to respond positively to the new circumstances in which large amounts of detailed archival materials are available? Are we going to try to critically assess the reliability of these data? Are we going to try to provide credible indicators of the Soviet experience that we can compare with other societies?

Conquest's response to these questions is disappointing, but not totally unexpected. In principle, he agrees that older work 'must be subject to major amendment' as new material becomes available. But in practice he is very resistant to changing his earlier views, despite the overwhelming evidence that his earlier estimates, and his minor 'reassessments', are still far too high. His comment on my article suggests that he is not really interested in the questions raised. He does not seriously discuss the reliability of the data, with which he is clearly unfamiliar, and which he wishes to dismiss out of hand.

In his brief Comment, Conquest claims a lot. He claims that the argument of my article is 'fundamentally flawed'. He claims that I 'claim to present the true, "archival" totals for the victims of Stalinism' and that this claim is 'fallacious'. He claims that my sources can be reduced to three documents, which are incompatible, incomplete and consciously faked. And he wishes to replace them by a set of other less 'detailed' and less 'precise' figures, which he thinks are more credible, and which, incidentally, support his earlier 'higher' estimates of the scale of the camps and of mortality in the repressions. In a somewhat contradictory manner he admits that 'the estimates I [Conquest] arrived at on Kolyma were indeed excessive, and as with other early estimates on the whole terror period, now that more is known they must indeed be subjected to major amendment'. But he then goes on to claim that 'in every other way my book remains a full and now fully verified account of the subject'. His comment then goes on to attack me for what he considers to be my 'conceptual error ... on the system's casualties over the USSR as a whole'. And in conclusion he adds that he also doesn't like my continual refusal to accept that 'Stalin consciously inflicted the 1933 famine', to which he addresses a few more comments.

Conquest's comments do not particularly disturb me. In fact, for those who can read the nuances, it will be apparent that his criticism is relatively mild. After all, 17

years ago, when, as a young research student, I first publicly addressed his misconceptions over the scale of forced labour, he was far more outspoken. At that time he accused me of 'distorting' and 'inadequately checking' statistical evidence, and of using arguments which 'amount to no more than a combination of sophistical algebra and unwarranted parochial assumptions'.<sup>2</sup> This was in response to my argument that his figure of eight million in the labour camps (nine million if you include prisons) was incompatible with the arguments about the scale of the camps which had been made earlier by Jasny, Timashev and Eason, and with an assortment of other evidence that I listed. On the basis of a careful analysis of the nature of Soviet society and the economy of the 1930s I concluded that it was impossible for there to have been more than four to five million in the labour camps in the late 1930s.<sup>3</sup> This is a conclusion that has now been totally vindicated, and that even Conquest occasionally accepts. I did not expect Conquest to make an apology, or to acknowledge his error, but his repeated insistence that the current figures have shown him to be correct on this question is a little hard to swallow.

From his recent comments it is difficult to unpick what he now thinks is my 'conceptual error'. He is clearly annoyed that I continue to challenge his figures, and in desperation has moved on to attack me for things that I have not said. Conquest's statement that I 'claim to present the true, "archival" totals for the victims of Stalinism' is ridiculous, as will be shown below. From his comment and the whole thrust of his recent writings, it appears that Conquest is still claiming that although his Kolyma figures are wrong, the rest of his earlier estimates as restated in *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (1990) are correct. If this were all, it would not matter so much, and we could leave Conquest to his dreams, but unfortunately other influential scholars appear to be accepting Conquest's claims that the new data confirm his 'high figures'.<sup>4</sup> And so I feel obliged to put the record straight (again).

My response to Conquest is long, because most readers of this academic journal will find it difficult to make sense of his brief comment. They will come away from it with the sense that 'the biggest name in the profession' thinks that the work of Wheatcroft and others who attempt to analyse the archival data is 'fundamentally flawed' and suffers from 'conceptual errors'. It will not matter to them that the technical arguments seem so complex that they cannot follow them. The harm will have been done—Conquest will have shown that he can still answer his critics, and that his earlier assessments or 'reassessments' are correct. I hope that the more thoughtful of the readers will go beyond this and will attempt to understand the arguments about the value of these new sources.

In this article I argue that despite all the smoke-screens Conquest is continuing to adhere to his old 'high figures' or his 1990 're-assessed high figures', which are both now untenable. At various times, in various places Conquest has made statements that approach a more realistic appreciation of the situation, but he then qualifies these statements and neutralises them by reconfirming his belief in his earlier figures. This leads him to reject a whole body of archival information in favour of hearsay and unsubstantiated literary sources.

Conquest is wrong in stating that I am claiming to present 'the ultimate truth'. Conquest is wrong in claiming that the new evidence vindicates his earlier 'high series' of camp and mortality data. Conquest is wrong in stating that my article is

based simply on accepting Kruglov's report (1954), the Shvernik report (1963) and the Zemskov figures (1989, 1991 and later). He is wrong in suggesting that the data in these reports can be easily shown to be false, and so should be dismissed as fabricated and of no use. He is right in stating that there is a partial incompatibility between these data, but he is wrong in his statements concerning the scale and size of this incompatibility, and what it implies for the Gulag data.<sup>5</sup> And finally, on a different topic, which Conquest has nevertheless raised here, Conquest is wrong in rejecting out of hand those who provide evidence that Stalin did not consciously plan the 1933 famine.

All these errors need to be addressed, but I will try to do this in a positive way, which will give the reader a greater understanding of the complexities of some of the important problems that are being discussed. I begin with a brief discussion of the history of writings on the 'casualty figures' and of Conquest's claims concerning these figures. For newcomers this can be seen as the plot so far. I then consider the nature and the origins of the archival sources, in particular their reliability and comparability, and the charges made by Conquest, that they can be dismissed as incompatible, incomplete and fake. Next I consider the alternative sources which Conquest claims are superior to the archival sources. The following section deals with a totally different question, mainly the discussion over control and intention regarding the famine. Finally I re-state the main conclusion that I believe should flow from my analysis of the data and compare it with some of the popular misunderstandings regarding it, that are still being repeated. The appendices contain some of the statistical data, as well as a consideration of some of the wilder conclusions that are currently being made, by otherwise sane academics, as a result of the claims of Conquest.

*A brief comment on the history of writings on the scale of the Soviet labour camps  
and Stalinist repression*

Conquest's major volume on *The Great Terror* has been treated as a classic ever since its appearance in 1968. His appendix on 'Casualty Figures' has been enormously influential and captured the imagination of many readers. Let me say at the outset that in the past I found this work useful. It contains a good account of most of the political and social literature which was available at the time. Unlike many other political works of the time, it paid particular attention to the scale of the terror.<sup>6</sup> Given the poor availability of material then, it was quite an achievement to produce such a survey. One of my earliest tasks as a research associate working for R. W. Davies and Moshe Lewin about two decades ago was to check on Conquest's casualty figures. At the time I concluded that the official Soviet view was wrong and that Conquest was correct to argue that the scale of violence was of demographic significance, but I also concluded that his evaluation of that scale was inaccurate.<sup>7</sup> Subsequent archival materials have shown that Conquest's estimates did indeed exaggerate the size of the labour camps and mortality in the labour camps, in the manner in which I had earlier explained. However, it must be said that Conquest's estimate of the number of executions in 1937-38 was somewhat less exaggerated than I and others had earlier expected.

Conquest's figures for the labour camps rested partly on those given by Professor Talgren (Swianiewicz) and others in the 1949 classic by Dallin and Nicolaevsky, *Forced Labour in the Soviet Union*.<sup>8</sup> The Dallin and Nicolaevsky work had estimated a level of 10 million in the labour camps in 1940. However, since the appearance of this classic there had been much serious work on the nature of the Soviet economy and society which had greatly improved our general understanding of how this society operated. Although many of these early revisionists were fiercely hostile to Stalin's Russia they nevertheless refused to accept the popular picture promoted by Dallin and Nicolaevsky, and insisted that there was little space for more than 4 million labour camp inmates in 1940.

In 1948 the sociologist Nicholas Timasheff used data on Soviet elections to calculate a scale of disenfranchised population that only allowed space for 2 million in the labour camps.<sup>9</sup> The economist Jasny was given a copy of the captured secret 1941 Plan of the Soviet National Economy, which contained Gulag production targets, by his former friend Dallin, who fully expected Jasny to confirm his figure of 10 million. However, the courageous Jasny increased his unpopularity in the USA by insisting in 1952 that it was impossible for this plan to cover more than 3.5 million forced labourers.<sup>10</sup> To claim such 'low' figures was very unpopular at the time,<sup>11</sup> and especially after 1956, when Khrushchev himself had admitted the nature of Stalin's horrors. The economist Bergson and the demographer Eason, who were working for the RAND Corporation (US Airforce), were understandably a little hesitant about giving too much publicity to this aspect of their finding, in the late 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>12</sup> In 1965 Swianiewicz, who had earlier (under the pen-name of Talgren) provided many of the statistical estimates for Dallin and Nicolaevsky, accepted much of the reasoning of Jasny and revised his earlier estimates of 10 million down to 6.9 million.<sup>13</sup>

Conquest in his survey in 1965 largely ignored the more serious (and complex) work of Timasheff, Jasny, Bergson, Eason and even Swianiewicz and presented what he repeatedly described as a 'conservative' evaluation of eight million in the camps in early 1939. He also claimed a level of seven million arrests between January 1937 and December 1938, one million executions and three million deaths in the camps in this period.<sup>14</sup> The labour camp estimates were 'conservative' in terms of Dallin and Nicolaevsky, but not in terms of the better founded estimates, which were available at the time, and which have subsequently been proven correct. We now have summary and detailed archival data which definitively prove that the lower estimates were correct.<sup>15</sup> As explained above, Conquest oscillates in his attitude as to whether to accept the current evaluations or to stay with his old ones.

Conquest's estimate of 7 million arrests derived from several sources, including the reports of Avtorkhanov and Dedijer, as well as the argument that the prison population in 1937–38 was larger than the 800 000 that were there in May 1934, and that prisoners on average stayed in prison three to four months.<sup>16</sup> These figures are much higher than those given by Kruglov and Shvernik in their 1954 and 1963 reports to Khrushchev (see below). Unfortunately we do not yet have access to the detailed data upon which these reports were calculated and consequently there remain some grounds for uncertainty concerning what exactly they cover. However, as I will explain below, there is far less basis for accepting the alternative figures based on

Conquest's literary sources, that have already been shown to be very unreliable in estimating the size of the camps population.

Conquest's estimate of the number of executions was also derived from a number of different sources. He noted that the memoir sources normally indicated 10% executions to arrests, which coupled with his seven million arrests would give 700 000 executions. Avtorkhanov estimated 500 000 executions in these years. Ginzburg's account of 70 executions a day in Lefortovo in August 1937 provides the basis for an estimate of 40 000 in Moscow for the two years of 1937 and 1938, which would give a total of 800 000 for the country as a whole. Data on mass graves unearthed by the Germans in Katyn and Vinnitsa were also mentioned. Other sources gave figures as high as three million executions, and Conquest concluded: 'It will be seen that no exact estimate of total executions can be made, but that the number was most probably something around a million'.<sup>17</sup> Despite the highly doubtful source of Conquest's calculations, the figure that Conquest proposed has turned out to be much closer to the one given by Kruglov and Shvernik than many of Conquest's critics, including myself, had expected.

Concerning mortality rates in the camps, Conquest cited Ekart's estimate that 'during the first year about one third of the prisoners die'. In combination with the figure of seven million arrests over 1937-38 (less one million executed), this rate of one-third new intake was assumed to provide the two million deaths in the camps in 1937-38. Conquest also cited a work by Wiles to claim an average camp mortality rate of 10% per year, rising to 20% in 1938. He then combined his 'high' population figures for the camps with a high average mortality rate of 100/1000 for the period 1936-50, in order to estimate a level of 12 million as labour camp mortality over the 1936-50 period.<sup>18</sup>

With the deportation of Solzhenitsyn from the Soviet Union and the appearance of his *Gulag Arkhipelago* in the early 1970s the scene was further transformed, with big camp figures becoming even more popular. Solzhenitsyn had challenged the Soviet authorities to prove that there were less than 10-12 million prisoners in the labour camps in 1941. Solzhenitsyn's work inspired a somewhat clumsy attempt by Steven Rosefielde to reconstruct Soviet economic history by incorporating large labour camp figures in 1981.<sup>19</sup> This led to a lengthy debate with Davies and me in *Slavic Review* and with me in this journal,<sup>20</sup> as we tried to correct these ill-informed but politically popular views.

Rosefielde rediscovered Dallin and Nicolaevsky and advocated a return to labour camp figures of over 10 million. I repeatedly insisted that I could see no good reason for moving away from the Jasny, Timasheff, Bergson and Eason figures.<sup>21</sup> Conquest commented that, although he had problems with Rosefielde, he preferred his figures to mine, and restated his case for eight million in the camps in early 1939.<sup>22</sup> It was at this time, and in defence of his high figures on labour camps, that Conquest launched at me the colourful but totally unfounded criticisms that I have already cited above.<sup>23</sup> These arguments became further confused by a somewhat amateurish discussion of the general level of excess mortality over this period.<sup>24</sup> This is a large separate question, which will be dealt with elsewhere.<sup>25</sup>

In November 1989<sup>26</sup> the Soviet historian Zemskov published a set of data on the scale of the labour camps, colonies and special exiles, which included a summary of

annual labour camp population movements for 1934–47. These data showed a total figure for the labour camp population of 0.5 million for 1 January 1934, 1.5 million on 1 January 1941 and 0.9 million for 1 January 1953. The population in the prisons and labour colonies accounted for a further 500 000 and there were just under a million in the places of ‘special’ (forced) exile. These data appear not to have been available to Conquest when he was writing his *Reassessment* (published in 1990), otherwise it would be difficult to see how he could have claimed that currently available data were supporting his figures.

I cited these Zemskov figures in this journal in April 1990.<sup>27</sup> I had originally intended to write a full-length article on repression and the camps, but I had just gained access to the Soviet statistical archives which contained TsUNKhU demographic materials for the famine period, and was naturally interested to get those materials into print. I kept the same title, but compressed the discussion of ‘New evidence on the scale of labour camps and exiles’ to a page. Nevertheless, in the introduction I stated that

The academic debate concerning the scale of repression and excess mortality in the USSR during the 1930s has been raging inconclusively for decades. The spread of *glasnost* in the USSR has so far done little to dampen the attitudes of the rival contenders in this debate in the West. Both Robert Conquest and myself have repeatedly claimed that the new evidence appearing in the Soviet Union has supported our conflicting claims. Conquest is clearly impressed with the bulk of literary evidence, which does indeed tend to agree with his conclusions; much in fact is based upon his own work. My attitude has always been to try to evaluate the nature of the evidence, to check its origins and the method of argumentation; in these terms the evidence that has been appearing in the Soviet press has been very mixed. ... In recent months especially there have been tremendous breakthroughs in the availability of archival materials in the Soviet Union.

After a brief discussion of Zemskov’s figures and those of Nekrasov, I pointed out that these figures gave a maximum number of 2.53 million prisoners in the camps, colonies and jails, 2.75 million special exiles (*spetsposeletsy*) and 65 332 in exile or banishment, which gave a total for 1953 of 5.35 million. ‘These figures are, of course considerably smaller than those cited by Conquest and Rosefelde for the Gulag population alone’. The camp mortality figures that could be calculated from the Zemskov data indicated an average level of 70 per thousand for the 1934–47 period. When applied to the smaller level of one to two million in gulag for 15 years, they would account for about 1.6 million deaths instead of the 12 million claimed by Conquest.

It was in this same year of 1990 that Conquest produced *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*. This must have been a very strange year for Conquest. On the popular level, he was now receiving mass adulation from within the Soviet Union, while at the serious academic level data were appearing that clearly undermined the detail of his arguments. Conquest naturally preferred to concentrate on the big issues, which were gaining him popular adulation. He failed to make any response to his academic critics in his book and other writings of the time, other than to parody them as ‘Neo-Stalinist Revisionists’.<sup>28</sup> It is certainly correct that the new material that emerged from the Soviet Union at that time undermined the traditional Soviet,

TABLE 1

CONQUEST'S ORIGINAL AND REVISED CASUALTY FIGURES (MILLIONS)

	1965	1990	1991
In jail or camp already January 1937	5	?	2.75
Arrested January 1937–December 1938	7	7	7
Executed	1	1	1
Died in camps 1937–38	2	2	2
In captivity late 1938	9	8	?
of which in prison	1	1	1
in camps	8	2–4	7 (or even a little less)
Total mortality in camps 1936–50			
Average labour camp population	8	7	5.5
Average mortality	100/1000	100/1000	100/1000
Total Camp mortality	12	10.5	8

*Sources:*1965: R. Conquest, *The Great Terror* (1968), p. 708.1990: R. Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (1990), pp. 485–486.1991: R. Conquest, *Soviet Studies*, 43, 5, 1991, p. 951.

semi-Stalinist view. But it is wrong to suggest that it undermined the view held by the more serious of Conquest's critics in the West. Viktor Danilov, who courageously tried to make this point in a letter to the editors of *Voprosy istorii*, was mercilessly attacked for daring to do so.<sup>29</sup> In these heady times Conquest was not prepared to accept the views of his Western critics. And there was much confusion about his claim that the evidence becoming available in the Soviet Union was tending to confirm his position. However, in one place in his book he did seem to accept that the new data were indicating that his earlier estimates were excessive, when he wrote that instead of his earlier figures of four to eight million 'the true figure may be lower, in the 2–4 million range'.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately this was a relatively rare moment, which was totally outweighed by his general conclusions. In his conclusions, in the same book, he retreated from that position and went only as far as to suggest that he was now 'inclined to reduce the 8 million [labour camp population] at the end of 1938 to 7 million, or even a little less'.<sup>31</sup> And he maintained his allegiance to the seven million arrests, the one million executions and the two million additional deaths in the camps.

Conquest replied to my 'More light' article in late 1991 with a brief article of which about a half was devoted to the excess mortality calculations, and a half to his figures on the camps and repression. Here he admitted that his estimates of the scale of population in the camps before and after the *Ezhovshchina* was likely to have been incorrect and that instead of five million in the camps, colonies, prisons and *spetsposelentsy* in January 1937 there may only have been 2.75 million. But he still advocated a figure of seven million arrests in 1937–38, and appears still to want to maintain that there was a level of death in camps or by execution of an estimated two to three million. This would consequently leave 5.5 to 6.5 alive rather than the eight million earlier estimated (actually nine if prisons are included). However, since his camp figure had fallen he would have to increase his estimated level of executions or mortality rates in order to get these results. This would appear to force him to deny the truth of the data upon which his estimates initially depended. He did not address

how he intended to resolve this apparent contradiction. Instead he moved on to make the following amazing claim:

but it remains the case that over the post-1937 period the ‘literary’ evidence (supported by recent Soviet evidence from provincial archives too) is considerably superior to the supposedly rigorous tables cited by Wheatcroft.<sup>32</sup>

This statement seems not only ungrounded but in direct contradiction to what most of the more serious evidence was showing.

Concerning mortality, Conquest indicated that he was not changing his views when he argued:

It will be seen from the above that however the pre-1937 excess dead are allotted, they can hardly have totalled less than about 10 million; and that (since we are told, in every source [sic] that no more than 10% of those in custody in 1937–38 survived), some 8 million more must have then followed.

We are already in the region of 18 million without taking into account the victims of the post-1938 arrests and deportations ... ‘The Twenty Million’, as they are now often written of in the USSR, cannot be a substantive exaggeration: Wheatcroft rightly remarks that high Soviet figures are sometimes derived from my own: but many are not, e.g. those of Shmelev, Yurasov, Mikoyan, Medvedev.

His overall conclusion was confused, and was clearly far more pitched at his appeal to a popular audience than to a serious academic audience, although he addressed it to the latter.

So far, it is true, I and those who take my view have only been *proved* right about the facts of the Stalinist terrors, against various Western critics. Still, perhaps even that should be taken into account in considering our inevitably less exact, but not therefore less serious, consideration of the figures, or ranges of figures, now under debate.

His first sentence would only make sense if he substituted the words ‘Soviet Stalinist’ for the word ‘Western’. His views have certainly not been proved correct against my criticism of him. Conquest appeared to admit that the 1937 census figures gave a more reliable indicator of the scale of the camps, colonies and prisons than his estimates based on literary sources. But he failed to notice that those census figures were totally compatible with the archival series and would tend to confirm the reliability of the archival data.<sup>33</sup> The *kontingent* figure from the 1939 census is also compatible with the camp archival data, but Conquest insists that his literary sources are better. And despite all this Conquest dared to claim that the data have ‘*proved*’ (his italics) him correct.

In October 1993 the archival figures, which clearly contradicted the Conquest picture, were published in an important article by Getty, Rittersporn & Zemskov in the influential *American Historical Review*. Naturally these authors did not waste much time in looking seriously at Conquest’s arguments.

Conquest replied to Getty, Rittersporn & Zemskov in June 1994 and again appeared in some places to accept that his earlier estimates of the size of the camp population had been too high. He tried to explain the error in terms of the level of deaths and executions being higher than he had earlier assumed. ‘Generally speaking, over the whole period, Western “high” estimates overestimated camp populations



partly because we underestimated executions and other deaths'.<sup>34</sup> And he was insistent in again claiming the superiority of his literary and unsubstantiated journalistic sources.

Rittersporn & Getty were quick to reply to Conquest as follows:

he has presented a familiar menu of press articles with sensational assertions from unverifiable sources. We would be glad to see a single exact citation from such sources, whose nature we apparently should trust because a small number of post-Soviet officials claim to have seen them. Nothing should prevent the Russian government from putting such data—even if they exist—at the disposal of researchers.<sup>35</sup>

Although the unsubstantiated press statements Conquest cites reveal a lot about the imagery today's Russian citizens have of their own country's past, they constitute sources on the history of mentalities and indicate nothing about penal repression in the USSR beyond its impact on people's minds. Times are changing, but the nature of Conquest's sources and the way that he employs them make him a prisoner of the self-image of the society he seeks to describe.

It is astonishing that at the moment when we finally have massive internal documentation—more detailed than anything the Nazis left—scholars would continue to speculate on alternative realities and not occupy themselves with the existing voluminous records. Specialists in the French Revolution waste little time arguing with writers who limit themselves to quoting what respectable politicians and journalists pretend to know about the subject. It is testimony to the sad state of their trade that students of Soviet history are not in a position to follow the example of their colleagues in other fields.

I share their astonishment. In fact four years later the grounds for astonishment are even greater than they were in 1992–94. Much more material has now appeared from the archives, and more Western scholars are becoming familiar with these materials. But curiously many influential books are being produced for the general readership that are continuing to subscribe to the fantasy that 'literary sources' which confirm Conquest's view are superior to the mass archival materials. The recent general European History by Norman Davies is a quite extreme example of this—so extreme that I cannot resist putting that record straight as well.<sup>36</sup>

Far from helping the discipline to analyse and improve our understanding of the phenomena of the terror, Conquest continues to deny that the archival sources can tell us anything about the scale and dynamics of repression, and he is still insisting that his old figures are correct.

In his reply to my article Conquest not only repeats his old claims about the superiority of his unsubstantiated literary and journalistic sources, but also claims that the archival data can be ignored since they are incompatible and clearly unreliable. This is a very negative and retrogressive suggestion. It is far less excusable than Conquest's nostalgic attachment to his earlier figures. However, since he goes on to attempt to explain what he thinks is wrong, it does give me the opportunity to explain why he is wrong and to demonstrate that the major part of his incompatibilities arise from his own lack of understanding of the problem.

Let us have a look at these data and at Conquest's claims regarding their reliability and comparability.

*The nature and origins of the different sets of archival data, their comparability and reliability, and Conquest's suggestion that the archive data are consciously falsified*

*The source and a brief history of the archival data*

The Soviet repressive system was complex and required records and a record-keeping system to operate. The managers of the Gulag, labour colony and special exile empires needed a set of accounting data to plan their work. The secret police and judicial authorities needed to keep records. The central party leadership also required periodic reports from the secret police/Ministry of Internal Affairs on developments in the Gulag, labour colonies and special exile areas, and on the policing and mass repression operations. In their time these official records were kept in the appropriate secret archives of the NKVD and the party leadership. These secret accounting materials should not be confused with the non-secret propaganda materials that were published at the time.

When the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) lost control of the labour camps (ITL) during the Khrushchev period, the labour camp archives were transferred to the State Archives of the Russian Federation (GARF) or TsGAOR as it was known then. What Conquest refers to as 'the Zemskov figures' are some of the summary data from these archives, which the Russian historian V. N. Zemskov was able to publish from the late 1980s.<sup>37</sup> These represent a few figures from amongst the thousands of files of Gulag accounting data which are now freely available for examination in *fond* 9401 of GARF.<sup>38</sup> The *fondy* contain conjunctural reports on Gulag work, supply reports concerning Gulag requests to have the government increase average personal food rations and the size of the Gulag contingent on food rations, health reports, and general accounting reports.

The data that Zemskov published in 1991 can be found in these files and are roughly but not totally compatible with the other Gulag accounting data.<sup>39</sup> Zemskov's main summary tables showing the annual transfers of population to and from these labour camps for the years 1934–53 are given in Appendix 2. These summary Gulag accounts appear to be the sum of the accounts for each separate camp unit. The commanders of these separate camps provided annual data on transfers of inmates to and from prisons or other places of detention<sup>40</sup> (*mesta zaklucheniya MZ*), to and from other camps. They listed those who ran away and those who were recaptured; those who were liberated and those who died; and there was also a small 'other section'.

Western historians who consider that all these data were falsified 60 years ago, and then held in secret to be produced in order to disinform them, appear to be suffering from an exaggeration of their own importance. When Gulag officials were pleading for more supplies they had no incentive to underestimate the number of prisoners. When Gulag officials were planning production they needed to know the real number of prisoners. Their health departments needed to know how many were dying. When MVD leaders were briefing Stalin in their top security 'Osobyie papki' reports they had good reason to avoid the charge of misleading him. When two different generations of MVD officials were briefing Khrushchev on the iniquities of their predecessors, in their top security reports, Kruglov in 1954 and Shvernik in 1963, they similarly had more to lose than to gain by falsifying the figures. Of course it

would be rash to presume these data were in any absolute way perfect, but there seem to be no intrinsic grounds for presuming that these indicators are greatly falsified.

Data on arrests, sentences, appeals and executions were generally handled separately depending upon whether the crimes were described as counter-revolutionary crimes against the state (listed in article 58 of the 1926 Criminal Code of the RSFSR) or as civil-criminal crimes (listed in other articles of the Criminal Code). The investigation and processing of Counter-Revolutionary (CR or in Russian K-R) crimes were normally supervised by the security agencies, OGPU until 1934 and then NKVD and later MVD. Although counter-revolutionary crimes could be tried by the civil courts, they were more frequently tried by special non-judicial organs, e.g. the Collegium of OGPU, the *troiki* of NKVD, Special Councils of the Military Collegium and military tribunals. This was particularly the case in 1937 and 1938. The data on arrests, sentences and appeals of all criminal cases and those few CR cases handled by the courts are available for the years from 1937 in the NKYust files in GARF (F.9492s) and are accessible (see Appendix 2). The data on arrests, sentences and appeals on most CR crimes, handled by the security agencies, are located in the OGPU archives and are generally not accessible. Some MVD reports based on the OGPU data are available in the special file (Osobyie papki) reports of the MVD to Stalin, to Molotov and Khrushchev that are also available in GARF. These include the Kruglov 1954 Report and the Shvernik 1963 Report (see Appendix 2).

Some researchers have been able to consult local security archives and details of arrests, sentences and actual executions are available in these sources.<sup>41</sup> Again these local materials would normally be divided between the different sentencing authorities.

Below I will discuss the comparability of the different parts of these data and consider Conquest's criticisms concerning their reliability and his proposals concerning alternative sources.

*The comparability of the archival data on the size of the labour camp population and the data on transfers to the camps*

In his 'Comment' Conquest notes that 'we are all inclined to accept the Zemskov totals (even if not as complete)'. But he goes on to give a totally misleading interpretation of what these data indicate:

with their 14 million intake to Gulag 'camps' alone, to which must be added 4–5 million going to Gulag 'colonies', to say nothing of the 3.5 million already in, or sent to, 'labour settlements'. However taken, these are surely 'high' figures.

It is a little unclear what Conquest is suggesting here. On the face of it he appears to be proposing that we reinstate his earlier high series of labour camp populations, which he had earlier appeared to abandon. By making reference to a camp intake in 1934–53 as high as 14 million Conquest is clearly trying to breathe fresh life into his earlier figures. A net intake of 14 million would seem to allow plenty of space for 7 million arrests in 1937–38, the high 10+ millions of deaths in the camps that Conquest still appears to adhere to, and still allow for the addition of 5+ million in

TABLE 2

THE SIZE OF THE SOVIET LABOUR CAMP POPULATION AND THE TRANSFERS TO THE CAMPS, 1934–1953 (MILLIONS)

	<i>To camps</i>	<i>Out of camps</i>	<i>Net to camps</i>
<i>(a) Documented archival sources: 1934–53</i>			
Prisons (MZ)	8	1.2	6.8
Other camps (ITL)	5.8	4.6	1.2
Recapture/run away	0.2	0.4	–0.2
Other	0.06	0.12	–0.06
All	14.1	6.3	7.8
Liberated		6.4	
Died		0.9	
Camp population recorded in 1934		0.5	
Camp population recorded in 1953		0.9	
Growth of camp population		0.4	
All liberated, died, and growth in population		7.7	
<i>(b) Conquest high figures: 1997</i>			
Transfers to camps, 1934–53	14		
Labour camp population average	8		
Average mortality	100/1000 per year		
Conquest's estimates of camp mortality	12		

*Sources:* See Appendix 2.

R. Conquest, *The Great Terror* (1968), p. 710, 'Taking the conservative figures of an average over the period 1936–50 inclusive of eight million population of the camps and a 10% death rate per annum, we get a total casualty figure of 12 million dead'.

the camps. His views need such a high figure of camp intake; anything under 10 million would clearly challenge their credibility.

Whatever it is that he is aiming at, his argument is invalid and can be shown to rest upon his inadequate understanding of how the labour camp statistics were put together and what they show. The figure of 14 million is a gross transfer of prisoners from camp to camp and from prison to camp.<sup>42</sup> The correct net figure, having deducted the transfers between prisons and camps, etc. is about 7.8 million, which is clearly incompatible with Conquest's rather than with our view (see Table 2). Conquest's criticisms of my data, on this score, follow simply from his own confusion about what the data refer to.

#### *The comparability of data on sentences and transfers to the camps*

Under the heading 'Shvernik report point b)', Conquest raises the same misconceptions over the data but now applies them to the years 1937–38, and takes his argument a little way further, by bringing in the data on sentences. He argues that there is an inconsistency between the Shvernik report figures of 1 372 392 arrests and 681 692 executions in 1937–38 and the Zemskov figure of 1 853 513 entering Gulag camps in that period. Conquest implies that there is an error of about 1.15 million.

The Shvernik report materials listed not only the arrests of those charged with CR<sup>43</sup> offences but also the sentences of CRs to execution, prison and camp, exile and other.

TABLE 3

ARRESTS, EXECUTIONS AND GROWTH IN GULAG LABOUR IN 1937–1938 (MILLIONS)

<i>(a) Documented archival data</i>			
	<i>To camps</i>	<i>Out of camps</i>	<i>Net</i>
Prisons (MZ)	1.44	0.10	1.34
Other camps (ITL)	0.413	0.454	– 0.04
Recapture/run away	0.058	0.09	– 0.03
Other	0.009	0.02	– 0.01
All	1.92	0.66	1.26
	<i>Political</i>	<i>Criminal</i>	<i>All</i>
All sentences	1.345	1.654	3.0
Executions	0.681	0.005	0.686
To camps and prison	0.635	0.730	1.365

*Sources:* see Appendix 2.

These data indicate that 634 820 CRs were sentenced in these years to the prisons and camps. Of these, 256 000 were listed as being sentenced to under three years imprisonment, with the remaining 378 000 probably being sent to the camps. Zemskov's gross figure for all transfers to camps (including transfers between camps and from prisons and other places of detention to camps) was about 1.9 million as indicated by Conquest. But if we were to exclude the 413 000 transfers between camps and the 100 000 returned to prisons, the transfers into Gulag camps would be reduced to 1.4 million. We are consequently faced with explaining where the additional 600 000 prisoners came from. This is the incompatibility that Conquest is referring to.

However, if we look at the data on arrests and sentences under criminal charges,<sup>44</sup> which are available in the Supreme Court archives (GARF, F.9492s; see Appendix 2), it is clear that in these years about 700 000 people were sentenced under non-political charges to loss of freedom. Some 180 000 were sentenced to terms of less than one year and so would probably have served these terms in prisons or labour colonies, leaving about 520 000–600 000 who would be the intake of criminal contingent into the camps in these years. Again we see no major contradiction, simply another reflection of Conquest's limited understanding of what the data refer to.

In a similar way, under the heading 'Shvernik report point c)', Conquest claims that 'the 9.8 million given by Zemskov as entering Gulag camps in 1939–52 is not compatible with the 1.1 million figure of arrests, minus executions, the Shvernik report gives for this period'.

Again Conquest's problems would disappear if he only understood the data a little better. Instead of the Zemskov data giving a gross inflow into the camps of 9.8 million, they give a net inflow of 5.4 million. The Shvernik report would indeed only allow one million 'politicals' to enter the camps, but the data on criminal sentences allow 7.6 million other prisoners to be sentenced to loss of freedom, and of these roughly 5.8 million were sentenced to more than two years. This will easily cover the net inflow of 5.4 million.

TABLE 4

SUM OF ALL TRANSFERS REPORTED BY SOVIET LABOUR CAMPS, 1939–1952 (MILLIONS)

*(a) Documented archival sources*

	<i>To camps</i>	<i>From camps</i>	<i>Net to camps</i>
Prisons (MZ)	5.26	1.03	4.22
Other camps (ITL)	4.70	3.52	1.18
All from prisons and camps	9.96	4.55	5.40
	<i>Arrests</i>	<i>Executions</i>	<i>To camps and MZ</i>
Political	1.11	0.05	0.99
Criminal	12.62	0.03	7.60
All	13.73	0.08	8.59

*Sources:* see Appendix 2.*The comparability and reliability of data on executions*

Another argument, which Conquest lists as ‘Shvernik report point a’), is somewhat different. At this point Conquest implies that I had not realised that the 4464 executions of CRs in 1939 and 1940 were too low to allow the inclusion of 25 700 Poles shot in 1940. If we ignore for the moment Conquest’s minor confusion over the figures of 25 700 and 21 857,<sup>45</sup> it can easily be pointed out that I was aware of this problem and quite clearly referred to it:

The clearest indication of a major omission is the execution of 21,857 Poles, Belorussians and West Ukrainians in 1940 following the Soviet occupation of parts of Poland as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.... The scale of such additional killings awaits the opening of the Presidential archives.<sup>46</sup>

Elsewhere in my article I referred at some length to prisoners of war and the foreign interned population. Conquest is certainly correct that these figures need to be included in order to make a proper evaluation of the total costs of Stalinism. But he is incorrect in suggesting that there is necessarily something suspicious about their exclusion, and that their exclusion is indicative that many similar mass executions were excluded. I think that the conclusions that we should make from this incident are exactly the opposite to those suggested by Conquest.

The data on the execution of the Poles, the execution of deserters<sup>47</sup> and the treatment of other foreign nationals, during war-time, were not included in the general tables that the MVD prepared for Khrushchev. Most reconstructions of statistical accounts carried out by Soviet officials in the post-World War II period used either the pre-1939 boundaries or the post-1945 boundaries. The Balts are generally included, because they were included in the post-World War II boundaries of the USSR, but the Poles are generally excluded. We would need to treat Western Ukraine more carefully. But it is totally understandable that these figures exclude POWs and the arrested Poles.

A much more significant problem over the comparability and reliability of data on executions concerns the extent to which executions in the localities exceeded those authorised at the centre, and whether the reported figures are based on the central

limits or a summation of local fulfilments. Khlevnyuk has recently addressed this question in his article 'Les mecanismes de la grande Terreur des années 1937–1938 au Turkmenistan'.<sup>48</sup> On the basis of a special investigation carried out by the Procurator's office under the direction of the Politburo and NKVD USSR in December 1939, it was established that there had been at least 812 unauthorised killings by the Turkmenistan NKVD in 1937–38. This represented roughly 25% more than the 3225 that had been authorised by the centre. Khlevnyuk points out that these figures could well indicate that the central figures reported under Khrushchev could be 'lower than reality'.<sup>49</sup> However, it should be pointed out that Turkmenistan was particularly distant from Moscow, it also had a particularly aggressive local NKVD and that these excesses were identified and condemned by the central authorities in Moscow. As I mentioned in my earlier article, Khlevnyuk, Zemskov and Roginsky, 'when independently consulted on this issue [the possible under-reporting of executions] all agreed that the official figures for executions might require some correction from 800 000 to possibly 1 million. None of them were prepared to accept the 1.5 million figure currently being advocated by Conquest'.<sup>50</sup>

#### *Conquest's claims regarding the more reliable literary sources*

Before considering Conquest's specific claims regarding his literary sources, I would just like to make one point, about the general reliability of eye-witness evaluations, that emerged from my study of the Holocaust literature.

It is clear that the quality of eye-witness reports for the Holocaust was immensely superior to those that we have for Stalin's repression. In many cases they were recorded by a professional legal service, which was supported by the military authority of occupying forces, which were actively pursuing these investigations. These investigations were carried out very soon after the events. The investigations heard evidence not only from camp inmates but the testimony of camp commanders and individuals who held key positions in the terror administration. Nevertheless, it is now accepted that the evidence accepted at Nuremberg to prove that 3.5 to 4.5 million people perished in Auschwitz alone is incorrect and that the true figure for Auschwitz mortalities is about 1.1 to 1.5 million.<sup>51</sup>

In his comment Conquest chides me for not taking seriously the unsubstantiated figures that he had cited from the comments of Mikoyan's son, Khrushchev's son-in-law, Olga Shatunovskaya, Dmitrii Volkogonov, Colonel Grashoven, Aleksandr Yakovlev and other unspecified researchers in the Ministry of Justice archives, who, he tells us, 'all support the "high" estimates' and 'give arrest figures in the 19–21.5 million range and death figures [presumably Conquest means 'execution' figures] of 7 million'.

These are the same cases that Conquest had earlier cited in his response to my article of 1990 and the 1993 article of Getty, Rittersporn & Zemskov in *AHR*, June 1994. It made more sense to cite them then than it does now. At that time the response of Getty & Rittersporn was appropriate, and it is even stronger now.<sup>52</sup>

In Table 5 I have listed the documented archival sources, together with the undocumented claims, in a manner that should help us see exactly what it is that Conquest wants us to believe. Some of our colleagues like Edwin Bacon seem to

TABLE 5

ARRESTS, SENTENCES AND EXECUTIONS ACCORDING TO THE ARCHIVES AND ACCORDING TO THE VERSIONS STILL APPARENTLY FAVOURED BY CONQUEST (MILLIONS)

(a) Arrests and sentences	Arrests		Sentences			
	All	Political	Criminal	All	Political	Criminal
(i) Documented archival sources						
1921–53				4.1		
1934–53				3.1		
1937–38			3.0	1.34	1.65	
1939–52			13.7	1.1	12.62	
(ii) Undocumented claims						
Volkogonov						
1929–53	21.5					
Shatunovskaya						
1935–41	19.84					
Grashoven						
1935–45	18.0					
(b) Executions				All	Political	Criminal
(i) Documented archival sources						
1921–53					0.799	
1934–53					0.740	
1937–38			0.687	0.682	0.005	
1939–52			0.083	0.054	0.029	
(ii) Undocumented claims						
Volkogonov						
1929–53			7.2			
1937			1.75			
Shatunovskaya						
1935–41			7			
Grashoven						
1935–45			7			
General A. Karbainov						
1937–38			3.5			

*Sources:*Volkogonov, 1929–53: D. Volkogonov, *Kuranty*, 9 May 1991.Shatunovskaya, 1935–41: Olga Shatunovskaya, *Argumenty i fakty*, 1990, 22, pp. 6–7.Grashoven, 1935–45: V. Tolz, 'Ministry of Security Official Gives New Figures for Stalin's Victims', *RFE/RL Research Report*, 1 May 1992, pp. 8–10.Volkogonov, 1937: D. Volkogonov, *Trotskii*, vol. 2, p. 323.Karbainov, 1937–38: D. Volkogonov, *Trotskii*, vol. 2, p. 323.

think that it is possible to reconcile some of these series.<sup>53</sup> I am doubtful about the value of attempting to do this.

There seem to be no grounds at all for taking these claims seriously. It is well known that many individuals in the Soviet Union leapt on Conquest's or Avtorkhanov's earlier writings, and were convinced that they were true. Many of these individuals appear to have been confused in their discussions with journalists, and appear to have cited Conquest's or Avtorkhanov's figures as though they had alternative sources for them. Conquest appears to have taken heart at the frequent mention of the seven million figure, and was quick to claim that this was confirmation of his earlier figures. But others are bound to be more sceptical. None of these



individuals has been able to provide any confirmation of any independent source for these figures, and they have generally not repeated these claims.<sup>54</sup>

*Additional data on sentences and executions in the military purges*

Several additional sources of data have become available to indicate that previous estimates of the scale of arrests and executions in the Ezhovschina were overestimated. Perhaps the most important of these are the materials on the mass purging of the Red Army after the Tukhachevsky trials.

During the Khrushchev period it had been claimed that 36 761 military and naval personnel had been repressed between May 1937 and September 1938.<sup>55</sup> Conquest accepted such a figure in the first edition of his book and claimed that this led to the loss of about 50% of the officer corps of 70 000.<sup>56</sup> The implication was that most of those who were repressed perished, although a very small number were rehabilitated at the beginning of the war. As late as 1989 the distinguished Russian military historian G. A. Kumanev claimed in *Pravda*:

According to archival data, for the period of only 27 February 1937 to 12 November 1938 the NKVD received from Stalin, Molotov and Kaganovich sanction to shoot 38 679 military personnel. If to this number you add more than three thousand destroyed naval commanders, and take into account that the destruction of military cadres began before 27 February 1937 and proceeded beyond 12 November 1938, then the number of innocent military commanders who perished would come close to 50 000 and the total number repressed in the army and the fleet would be considerably higher.<sup>57</sup>

However, it is now generally accepted that all these figures are very misleading and that Kumanev's figures are just totally wrong. A report from deputy People's Commissar of Defence E. A. Shchadenko did indeed indicate that 36 761 officers were discharged from the army in 1937–38, but of these only 10 868 were arrested.<sup>58</sup> Most of the 14 684 officers discharged at this time were expelled from the Communist Party for 'association' with those officers arrested, and of these roughly a half or 7202 were reinstated by 1939. Of those arrested by the NKVD 1431 were also reinstated by 1939. Overall the total permanent reduction to the military by the purges in these years was more like 17 000, or 22 705 if we include 1939 and other categories of discharge. Since the commanding staff of the army numbered 144 300, rather than the 70 000 earlier believed, the purges affected at most about 16% of officers, and not the 50% earlier believed.

This is an interesting tale, which incidentally warns against the dangers of accepting journalistic reports from respectable individuals who ought to be in the position of knowing what they are talking about.

*Finally: a word about the 'truth' and what to expect from data*

I was very surprised that Conquest should state that I was claiming to present 'the true, "archival" totals for the victims of Stalinism'. I may not have great sympathy with post-modernism, but I would be reluctant to claim to have found the 'truth'. Concerning the data on arrests, sentences and executions, I wrote the following:

Although the main archives of the state security organisations are still unavailable for general scholarly investigation, a few researchers have been given access and have published some general figures from these archives. These released figures provide the following indications ...

Later I pointed out some of the omissions and inadequacies of these data. In particular I stated:

Apart from these victims of repression listed above there were other categories of victims, which included those whose trials and sentences were not initiated by the secret police and other groups, including the very large group of forced migrants and exiles, which were not included in the above lists ... We should also note that the large number of exiled kulaks and deported nationalities are not included in the above list.

When discussing the data on the labour camps, I was far less circumspect, because we do have direct access to the archival sources on the labour camps and our knowledge is consequently much more firmly based. On p. 1330 I had written about the rival estimates of the scale of the labour camps that had been made before the archives were opened. And I had contrasted the higher estimates of 'Dallin and Nicolaevsky, Schwartz and Avtorkhanov supported by Conquest, Solzhenitsyn and Rosefelde' with the lower estimates of Timasheff, Jasny and Bergson and Eason supported by Wheatcroft'. It was in that respect that I had concluded that:

Some specialists on Soviet history are finding it difficult to adapt to the new circumstances when the archives are open and when there are plenty of irrefutable data; they prefer to hang on to their old Sovietological methods with round-about calculations based on odd statements from emigres and other informants who are supposed to have superior knowledge.

Perhaps I went too far in suggesting that these data presented 'irrefutable' proof of the smaller series of data. I underestimated Conquest, who apparently still holds to his earlier high estimates of the scale of labour camps, and to even higher estimates of the scale of mass killings than he earlier adhered to.

Conquest argues that we should only consider perfect data and should reject all data that are not 'perfect'. This seems to be the basis of his rejection of the archival data. Conquest is wrong in suggesting that I consider the archival data to be 'perfect' reflections of the 'truth'. This is clearly nonsense. What we have to do is to try to assess the limits of the unreliability of all of these data. When I spoke about 'plenty of irrefutable data' I did not mean to suggest that there were unique pieces of data which gave the perfect truthful picture. Rather I had in mind the accumulation of a mass of different types of data (of differing degrees of reliability), which, when taken together came down heavily in favour of the lower estimates for the size of the labour camps. That is now something that should be considered as academically proven, and Conquest was clearly wrong. The situation regarding arrests and executions is slightly less clear. But Conquest's proposals concerning them are highly unlikely.

Let us look briefly at some of the other misconceptions that Conquest has raised concerning the famine.

*Misconceptions about 'control' over the famine*

Conquest initially cited evidence, based on the preliminary reports of a highly respected Soviet scholar (Danilov), to claim that Stalin and the Politburo accumulated grain stocks during the famine year of 1932/33. According to Conquest the government had accumulated and held 4.53 mln tons of grain reserves at the height of the 1932/33 famine, on the eve of the 1933 harvest. A detailed investigation of the archives indicates that this was a mistaken claim, based on confusing a plan figure for reality.<sup>59</sup> The Politburo certainly intended to accumulate grain stocks in 1932/33, and they had several good reasons to do so:

- (a) the level of stocks at the beginning of the 1932/33 agricultural year was considered to have been dangerously low and likely to cause a breakdown in regular supply;
- (b) the government had been trying to accumulate a series of reserves that it felt it would need in the case of a threat of war. These were the so-called 'mobilisation fund'; and
- (c) the government had been further disturbed by the Japanese invasion and occupation of Northern Manchuria, which was threatening the Russian Far East. The Soviet government were consequently urgently seeking to build up reserve stocks in the major deficit region of the Russian Far East.

Despite these factors pressing the government to accumulate stocks, and the clearly expressed desire to do so, the Politburo was repeatedly forced to issue emergency grain supplies (both seed and food) to agriculture and the famished population. This has been documented in some detail by Davies & Wheatcroft in a forthcoming article.<sup>60</sup>

Because of the sensitivity of this problem the government undertook several procedures of disinformation. Radek leaked to Western diplomats and the Western press that part of the reason for the grain shortages in 1932/33 was the need to accumulate grain reserves in the East.<sup>61</sup> The Soviet military archives reveal that no such stocks were accumulated at the time, hence the need for an agent of disinformation. Also it appears that although the Politburo was repeatedly granting food and seed aid to starving regions throughout 1932/33, it forbade any mention of this. It presumably did this for two reasons: (a) to contain what otherwise would have been a rush of applications and (b) in order not to let potential enemies know that reserve stocks were not available.

As a result of the Politburo not building up stocks, and repeatedly issuing food and seed aid throughout 1932/33, by the end of the 1932/33 agricultural year grain stocks were almost as dangerously low as they had been at the beginning of the year. There were virtually no reserves and the operating stocks, i.e. those currently circulating stocks within the system, were as low as 1.9 million tons, although, as a result of errors, it seems likely that the leadership at the time thought that there were only 1.4 million tons. At the time, this was considered a dangerously low level. Although the collection of the harvest would begin in early July, it would not get into full swing until late July. Even then it would take several more weeks before the new grain was transported around the country, and taken to the mills for milling. So it would probably be in August before the new flour could be taken to the bakeries for baking into bread. This was a critical transition period of maybe a month or a month and a half. The country would normally need a minimum of two million tons of transition

grain to ensure that there was no breakdown in supplies and mass starvation, before the new grain was harvested, processed and transported into the hands of the consumers. This has all been explained in great detail in our article.

Conquest, having made the initial error of publicising Danilov's preliminary figure of an accumulation of 4.5 million tons of grain reserves, now misquotes our correction, and demonstrates his lack of understanding of the detailed operations of the system. Instead of accepting that there were not 4.5 million tons of reserve stocks but 1.9 million tons of transition stocks, he misquotes us as having said three million tons, and he continues to insist on describing these as reserves, as opposed to the transition stocks. He is wrong in suggesting that the system could easily have been drained of all of these circulating stocks without wrecking of the supply system and causing massive urban famine.

### *Conclusion*

The conclusion that has to be made from a careful analysis of Conquest's claims is that his criticisms are groundless, and that he does not understand the material that he seeks to reject.

While we lack access to the State Security archives and the Presidential archives, there is considerable material available from the archives that demonstrates that the scale of the camps was much lower than Conquest had earlier claimed. These materials appear to be comparable with the published reports from the archives that are still restricted, and they strongly suggest that the number of arrests and executions and deaths in the camps were significantly lower than those claimed by Conquest. The alternative sources offered by Conquest are unsubstantiated journalistic reports from individuals who might have been in a position to see the kind of documents that they are referring to. But the vagueness of their reports, the suspicious focus on the seven million figure, and the total lack of any confirmation must lead us to be very sceptical of the value of these sources.

My 1996 article attempted to place some of the available data in a comparative framework, and argued that it was the scale and nature of the Soviet mass-killing operations of 1937–38 which were particularly significant, in terms of a comparison with mass repression in Nazi Germany. The Gulag is to some extent an inappropriate symbol.

There should be no doubt that the future of the academic study of Soviet society during the Stalin period lies with a critical understanding of the wealth of archival sources, and not with the further analysis of unsubstantiated journalistic reports and literary sources.<sup>62</sup> These literary materials will always be useful, as secondary materials, but their time as the sole and dominant source is over. And we should not be hindered by the comments of the masters of the literary sources, who do not understand these other materials.

We are still at early stages in understanding the nature of Stalinism, but assessing the scale of several of its dimensions and placing that scale into some kind of perspective seem to me to be a useful way to start. I welcome constructive comments to help us improve our understanding, but I reject attempts to limit and cripple our discipline.

*Appendix 1: Corrections to the Kolyma data, and further discussion on the comparability of camp data*

In my 1996 article the data which I cited for prisoners arriving at Nagoevo, the only transit point into Kolyma, came from the Soviet archives indirectly from A. Kozlov, the curator of the Magadan Historical Museum, as cited by J. J. Stephan in his book *The Russian Far East: A History*. It now appears that either Kozlov or Stephan had mis-cited these data, which refer not to prisoners arriving at Nagoevo but to the total stock of prisoners in Kolyma.

Table A1.1 compares the data earlier cited from Pilyasov's study of the size of the Dalstroi labour force with those given by Batsaev from local archives, and by Zemskov from central archives. The Batsaev data, cited here from Tkacheva, also provide indicators of movements of prisoners both to Nagoevo and also their return from Nagoevo (the main port of Kolyma in Dalstroi).

The main discrepancy between the contents of the separate Gulag files and the published totals given by Zemskov appears to be the omission in most of the Gulag files of information from USVITL, which was technically a part of Dalstroi. As I understand the situation Dalstroi and USVITL had a unique relationship. Dalstroi was a state enterprise that was taken over by the OGPU and USVITL was a labour camp that was transferred to it. The USVITL materials (accounting data, conjuncture reports and possibly health materials) were presumably kept in the Dalstroi files rather than in central Gulag administration. Fortunately local Dalstroi materials are available, and from them it would appear that much of the difference between the Gulag totals by year and by camp that I have seen in the archives, and the Zemskov totals, is attributable to the inclusion of USVITL and possibly a few other minor camps. The difference in any case is not great, as can be seen from Table A1.2. It should also be pointed out that both these series are compatible with the special contingent reports in the 1937 and 1939 censuses. My conclusions are that the Dugin data for 1931–35 may be a little low in comparison with the archival data; the data for 1936–38 are probably about right, but either the Dugin data for 1939–40 are too high or the Dalstroi and other data are too low.

TABLE A.1.1

DIFFERENT SERIES OF ARCHIVAL DATA ON THE MOVEMENT OF THE DALSTROI LABOUR FORCE,  
1932–1941

	<i>All Labour</i>		<i>Prisoners</i>			<i>Arrivals</i>	<i>Departures</i>	<i>Net arrivals</i>
	<i>Pilyasov</i>	<i>Tkacheva</i>	<i>Pilyasov</i>	<i>Batsaev</i>	<i>Zemskov</i>			
1932	14 000	13 053		9900		1387	872	515
1933	27 000	30 782		27 400		23 703	5974	17 729
1934	37 700	35 995	31 800	32 300		15 673	9012	6661
1935	48 700	50 301	42 800	44 600	36 313	23 268	9550	13 718
1936	67 500	73 150	56 900	62 700	48 740	41 311	18 523	22 788
1937	74 700	92 258	63 000	80 300	70 414	41 663	21 248	20 415
1938	144 600	113 430	122 000	93 900	90 741	68 269	34 492	33 777
1939	197 300	189 826	132 000	163 500	138 170	70 492	26 176	44 316
1940	237 300	216 422	142 400	176 600		47 379	3872	43 507
1941	246 900	210 674	149 600	148 300		22 963	14 066	8897

*Sources:*

A. N. Pilyasov, *Dinamika promyshlennogo proizvodstva v Magadanskoj oblasti (1932–1992gg)*, Part 1 (Magadan 1993), p. 225.

I. D. Batsaev, 'Kolymskaya gryada arhipelaga Gulag, zaklyuchennye', in *Istoricheskie aspekty Severo-Vostoka Rossii: Ekonomika, obrazovanie, Kolymskii GULag* (Magadan, 1996), p. 50.

B. Zemskov, 'Zaklyuchennye v 30-e gody (demograficheskii aspekt)', *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, 1996, 7, p. 6, citing GARF, F. 9414, op. 1, d. 1155, l. 2, 20-2.

TABLE A.1.2

FITTING DALSTROI DATA INTO THE ARCHIVAL SUMMARIES

	<i>All Gulag archives (column 1)</i>	<i>Dugin (column 2)</i>	<i>Dugin less archives (column 3 col. 1 – col. 2)</i>	<i>Dalstroi Pilyasov (column 4)</i>	<i>Other (column 5, col. 3 ± col. 4)</i>
1 January 1930	128 963	179 000			
1 June 1930	156 000				
1931	260 000	212 000	– 48 000		
1932	267 000	268 700	1700		
1933	436 000	334 300	– 101 700		
1934	583 000	510 307	– 72 693	31 800	40 000
1935	738 000	725 483	– 12 517	42 800	– 30 000
1936	785 000	839 406	54 406	56 900	– 2500
1937	786 100	820 881	34 781	63 000	29 000
1938	876 957	996 367	119 410	122 000	3000
1939	988 333	1 317 195	328 862	132 000	197 000
1940	1 105 238	1 344 408	239 170	142 400	197 000
1941	1 294 765	1 500 524	205 759	149 600	56 000

*Sources:*

The All Gulag archival series in column I refers to the detailed materials in GARF, F. 9414, op. 1, d. 2919.

The Dugin series was first published by A. Dugin, 'Gulag glazami istorika', in *Na boevom postu* and was reprinted in *Soyuz*, 9 February 1990, p. 16 and referred to figures from a Kruglov, Rudenko & Gorshenin report to Khrushchev in 1954.

The local Dalstroi series is taken from Pilyasov, see Appendix 1.1.

Appendix 2: Statistics on sentences, convictions and transfers to, from and between prisons in the USSR, 1920–1956. See tables A2.1, A2.2, and A2.3

TABLE A2.1

GENERAL CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS AND SENTENCES

	All sentences	Death penalty	Loss of freedom				10 + years	All	Non-custodial sentences				Freed by amnesty
			0–1 years	2–5 years	6–10 years	10 + years			Corrective-labour work	Conditional sentence	Fine	Social work	
1937	851 847	3176	90 162	264 208	44 488	398 858	337 566	61 718	36 150	10 306	4073		
1938	802 183	1661	91 130	216 773	23 165	331 588	345 655	67 255	43 233	9699	3 092		
1939	850 019	1137	96 895	238 357	14 075	349 740	354 546	84 069	44 605	12 970	2952		
1940	1 105 308	2044	242 280	338 887	26 403	607 677	344 532	77 211	58 123	12 606	3115		
1941	1 023 891	10 655	26 995	383 960	56 123	467 201	212 424	32 784	39 031	17 522	2274		
1942	791 745	7650	177 574	312 438	69 746	49 559 807	145 371	43 570	30 741	3624	982		
1943	719 963	2028	123 615	236 297	42 959	402 972	189 723	97 633	23 406	3154	1047		
1944	799 700	1297	147 122	242 326	32 798	422 331	228 717	120 196	21 675	4312	1172		
1945	773 305	942	146 472	243 588	27 973	418 144	190 518	96 365	25 037	4814	882	36 603	
1946	1 015 915	2017	238 788	345 899	44 391	629 239	228 652	99 052	37 012	11 457	1463	7023	
1947	1 317 565	1621	239 603	484 536	236 138	976 537	204 254	76 161	44 107	12 068	1696	1 121	
1948	968 301		98 805	251 225	260 403	661 544	173 087	63 822	46 497	21 027	2014	310	
1949	877 314		105 493	212 655	222 132	61 919	602 199	147 762	31 224	34 267	1443		
1950	782 794		81 264	184 847	184 483	56 971	507 565	54 609	31 201	43 257	1223		
1951	754 450		79 541	189 394	156 326	47 830	473 091	141 195	52 373	31 712	55 158	921	
1952	835 453		80 898	217 583	169 690	51 034	519 205	155 183	47 385	63 113	1064		
1953	690 877		60 340	220 296	139 442	39 399	459 477	88 298	33 713	25 312	53 286	1859	
1954	622 001	386	63 393	193 025	87 328	27 037	370 783	130 045	56 135	25 186	35 677	28 932	
1955	653 719	1206	74 740	211 533	85 488	23 150	394 911	169 902	55 891	29 377	657	2662	
1956	787 232	1276	97 921	270 465	98 917	26 558	493 861	194 107	65 053	29 698	799	160	
1937–38	1 654 030	4837	181 292	480 981	67 653	520	730 446	683 221	128 973	79 383	20 005	0	
1939–52	12 615 723	29 391	1 885 345	3 881 992	1 543 640	286 275	7 597 252	2 860 904	1 007 767	511 756	299 349	45 057	
1937–52	14 269 753	34 228	2 066 637	4 362 973	1 611 293	286 795	8 327 698	3 544 125	1 136 740	591 139	319 354	45 057	

Source: GARF, F. 9492s.ch, op. 6s, d. 14, l. 29, measures of criminal punishment in cases with preliminary investigation considered by the general courts for 1937–56 for the USSR.

TABLE A2.2  
POLITICAL CONVICTIONS AND SENTENCES, INVESTIGATED BY THE SECURITY FORCES, 1921-1953 ('KRUGLOV FIGURES')

All sentenced	(i) All political sentences										(ii) All political sentences to death									
	By whom sentenced					By whom sentenced					By whom sentenced					By whom sentenced				
	V.M.N.	Camps & prisons	Exile	Other	Tribunals & Courts	Collegium of OGPU	Special conferences	Troiki	Tribunals & Courts	Collegium of OGPU	Special conferences	Troiki	Tribunals & Courts	Collegium of OGPU	Special conferences	Troiki	Other unallocated			
1921	35 829	9 701	21 724	1817	2587	35 829							9701							
1922	6003	2656	166	1219		6003 no data on who sentenced							1962							
1923	4794	414	2336	2044		4794 "							414							
1924	12 425	2550	4151	5724		3059							2550							
1925	15 995	2433	6851	6274	437		2284	4490					2433							
1926	17 804	990	7547	8571	696		2323	2379					990							
1927	26 036	2363	12 267	11 235	171		3434	15 947					2363	517		473	0			
1928	33 571	869	16 211	15 640	1037		3756	25 844					869	779		1584	0			
1929	56 220	2109	25 853	3741	14 609		10 262	37 197					2109	440		429	0			
1930	208 069	20 201	114 443	58 816	14 609		9072	179 620					20 201	1383		726	0			
1931	180 696	10 651	105 683	63 269	1093		13 357	14 592					10 651	1229		18 966	6			
1932	141 919	2728	73 946	36 017	29 228		6604	26 052					2728			9170	1481			
1933	239 664	2154	138 903	54 262	44 345		214 334	25 330					2154				2728			
1934	78 999	2056	59 451	5994	11 498		12 588	1003					2056				2154			
1935	267 076	1229	185 846	33 601	46 400		118 467	29 452					1229				2056			
1936	274 670	1118	219 418	23 719	30 415		114 383	18 969					1118				2056			
1937	790 665	353 074	429 311	13 666	6914		45 060	17 911					353 074				1118			
1938	554 258	328 618	205 509	16 842	3289		95 057	413 433					328 618				1118			
1939	63 889	2552	54 666	3783	2888		50 868	13 021					2552				1281 692			
1940	71 806	1649	65 727	2142	2288		28 894	42 912					1649				2552			
1941	125 411	8011	65 000	1200	1210		48 877	26 534					8011				2552			
1942	124 406	23 278	88 809	7070	5249		46 858	77 598					23 278				1649			
1943	78 441	3579	68 887	4787	1188		53 307	25 134					3579				8011			
1944	75 109	3029	73 610	649	821		64 498	10 611					3029				23 278			
1945	123 248	4252	116 681	1647	668		96 667	26 581					4252				3579			
1946	123 294	2896	117 943	1498	957		114 974	8320					2896				3029			
1947	78 810	1105	76 581	666	458		65 417	13 393					1105				4252			
1948	73 269	419	72 552	419	298		56 012	17 257					419				2896			
1949	75 125	8	64 509	10 316	300		36 665	38 460					8				1105			
1950	60 641	475	54 466	5225	475		41 222	19 419					475				8			
1951	54 775	1609	49 142	3425	599		45 699	9076					1609				475			
1952	28 800	1612	25 824	773	591		27 842	958					1612				475			
1953	8403	198	7894	38	273		8199	204					198				475			
1921-53	4 060 306	799 473	2 634 397	413 512	215 942		894 739	638 609					799 473				8			
1934-53	3 084 53	740 348	2 101 826	125 160	116 779		400 176	843 647					740 348				475			
1939-52	1 107 024	54 055	994 397	43 600	17 990		777 800	329 274					54 055				475			

Source: V. P. Popov, 'Gosudarstvennyi terror v sovetskoi Rossii, 1923-1953, gg. (istochniki i ikh interpretatsiya)', *Otechestvennye arkhivy*, 1992, 2, p. 28.

Table prepared by Colonel Pavlov of 1st. Special Dept of MVD, dated 11/12/1953, and sent by General Kruglov (head of MVD) to Malenkov & Khrushchev on 5 January 1954.

Executions by agency: see *Rasstr'nye spiski*, vyp. 2, *Vagan Kovskoe Mladshitshe, 1926-1936* (Moscow, 1995), pp. 280-282, and *Leningradskii Martirolog, 1937-1938*, vol. 1, August-September 1937 (St Petersburg, 1995).



TABLE A2.3  
DETAILED GULAG ACCOUNTING DATA ('ZEMSKOV FIGURES')

	Present on 1 January	From prisons	To prisons	Net from prisons	Arrivals		Departures		From run away	Net returned	Run away	Net gain	From other	To other	Net other	Liberated	Died	Present on 31 December
					from other	NKVD	from other	NKVD										
1930	179 000			380 197														212 000
1931	212 100			428 018	17 169	100 389	103 002	-2613	46 732	83 490	-40 000?		1374	1298	?		-13 197	268 700
1932	268 700			380 687	28 976	67 265	72 190	-4925	45 988	67 493	-36 738		1412	2383	76		-67 297	334 300
1933	334 300			407 616	43 826	157 355	170 484	-13 129	35 891	58 313	-22 422		1381	1832	-971		-21 035	510 307
1934	510 307	445 187		407 616	23 826	157 355	170 484	-13 129	35 891	58 313	-22 422		1381	1832	-971		-21 035	725 483
1935	725 483	409 663		407 616	23 826	157 355	170 484	-13 129	35 891	58 313	-22 422		1381	1832	-971		-21 035	839 406
1936	839 406	431 442		592 833	43 916	214 607	214 607	-37 745	22 679	32 033	-9354		7758	16 536	-8778		-90 546	906 367
1937	820 881	636 749		747 217	202 721	240 466	240 466	-37 745	22 679	32 033	-9354		7758	16 536	-8778		-90 546	996 367
1938	996 367	803 007		747 217	202 721	240 466	240 466	-37 745	22 679	32 033	-9354		7758	16 536	-8778		-90 546	1 317 195
1939	1 317 195	383 994		747 217	202 721	240 466	240 466	-37 745	22 679	32 033	-9354		7758	16 536	-8778		-90 546	1 344 408
1940	1 344 408	644 927		587 714	498 399	563 338	563 338	-649 939	8839	11 813	-2974		6237	6432	-195		-46 665	1 500 524
1941	1 500 524	840 712		705 175	488 964	540 205	540 205	-51 241	6528	10 592	-4064		7459	16 984	-9525		-100 997	1 415 596
1942	1 415 596	544 583		358 006	246 273	252 174	252 174	-5901	4984	11 822	-6838		10 207	12 917	-2710		-809 538	999 738
1943	983 974	355 728		215 635	114 152	140 756	140 756	-26 604	3074	6242	-3168		4221	7344	-3123		-336 153	663 594
1944	663 594	326 928		287 625	48 428	64 119	64 119	-5 691	1839	3586	-1747		2394	7590	-152 131		-60 948	715 506
1945	715 506	361 121		290 934	59 707	96 438	96 438	-36 731	953	2196	-1243		2136	6105	-3969		-43 848	808 839
1946	600 897	461 562		362 230	172 844	182 647	182 647	-9803	1203	2642	-1439		579	9771	-9192		-115 700	808 839
1947	808 839	624 345		565 563	121 633	153 899	153 899	-32 266	1599	3779	-2180		1043	2388	-1345		-35 668	1 008 057
1948	1 108 057	482 498		381 597	213 102	203 938	203 938	-9164	2494	4261	-1767		870	2162	-1292		-261 148	1 216 361
1949	1 216 361	882 235		71 891	564 800	325 036	325 036	-32 266	1599	3779	-2180		1043	2388	-1345		-35 668	1 008 057
1950	1 416 300	71 339		561 660	258 269	306 321	306 321	-32 266	1599	3779	-2180		1043	2388	-1345		-35 668	1 008 057
1951	1 533 767	55 291		33 446	657 557	250 836	250 836	-32 266	1599	3779	-2180		1043	2388	-1345		-35 668	1 008 057
1952	1 711 202	14 849		603 093	221 619	381 474	381 474	-987	7919	785	-370		0	1949	-1949		-937 352	897 051
1953	1 727 970	16 853		7919	393 504	278 240	278 240	-987	7919	785	-370		0	1949	-1949		-937 352	897 051
Total 1937-38	1 439 756		99 706	1 340 050	414 207	455 073	455 073	-40 866	58 139	90 297	-32 158	0	8874	19 261	-10 387	0	-644 403	-115 922
Total 1939-52	5 256 112	1 033 714	4 222 398	4 699 029	3 515 444	1 183 585	47 053	77 997	-30 944	45 765	-144 137	58 806	116 279	57 473	0	-4 049 403	-688 388	
Total 1934-53	7 999 013	1 212 325	6 786 688	5 831 745	4 594 433	1 237 316	234 238	3 78 375	58 806	116 279	-144 137	58 806	116 279	57 473	0	-6 539 009	-873 703	

Sources:  
1937-53: V. N. Zemskov, 'Gulag (Istoriko-sotsiologicheskii aspekt)', *Sotsiologicheskoe issledovanie*, 1991, 69, pp. 14-15 and Getly, Rittersporn & Zemskov, *American Historical Review*, June 1994.  
1932-34: GARG, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740,153.

*Appendix 3: The unfortunate errors of Norman Davies*

Norman Davies' recent book on European History has received great acclaim<sup>63</sup> and is widely available. But in his treatment of Stalinist repression Davies has been greatly misled by Conquest and others. Not only does he appear to believe that Conquest's high figures on the scale of repression have been vindicated, but he offers an account of these figures which, I hope, would cause even Conquest to protest. The errors seem to me to be so serious that I feel impelled to list them and correct them. I sincerely hope that future editions of the book will not contain the blemish that the current volume bears. At various places I offer an alternative set of wordings for the incorrect statements.

On p. 962 Davies writes:

In the 1930s [the main instruments of coercion and terror] were expanded to the point where the manpower of the security agencies rivalled that of the Red Army, and the camps contained up to 10% of the population. By 1939 the Gulag was the largest employer in Europe. Its prisoner-employees, the zeks, who were systematically starved and overworked in arctic conditions, had an average life expectancy of one winter.

Comment:

Concerning the population in the camps. If the camps had contained 10% of the population in 1939, this would mean 17 million people. Conquest never suggested more than 8 million for the end of 1938, and the currently accepted figure is 1.3 million in the camps. 0.3 million in the colonies, about 300 000 in the prisons and about a million in places of special exile, i.e. 1.3 million for the camps alone and 2.9 million for the entire repressive system. It would be better to say that the camps contained less than 1% of the population, but this figure could rise to 2.5% if we were to add the populations of prisons, labour colonies and places of special exile.

Concerning the level of mortality in the camps, the life expectancy was certainly more than one year. Conquest accepts Ekart's claim that one-third of the new population died in its first year. This would imply considerably more than a three year life expectancy and a mortality rate of 33%. However, he points out that life expectancy increased for later years, and he accepts the calculation made by Wiles that average mortality rates were 10% or 10 per thousand. The archival data give a slightly lower average rate of 7%.

On page 964 Davies writes:

early in 1939 Stalin and Molotov were signing lists of several thousand named victims each morning, whilst every regional branch of the security police was scooping up far greater quotas of random civilian innocents.

Comment:

This would be highly exaggerated for late 1937 or early 1938 when the repression was at its peak. For early 1939, when repression rates were very low, it is totally incorrect.

Further on p. 964 Davies writes:

For many decades, opinion in the outside world was unable to comprehend the facts. Prior to the documentary writings of Alexander Solzhenitsyn in the 1960s, and the publication of painstaking research by a few courageous scholars, most people in the West thought that stories of the Terror were much exaggerated. Most Sovietologists sought to minimise it. The Soviet authorities did not admit it until the late 1980s. Stalin, unlike Hitler, did not pay the price of public exposure. The total tally of his victims can never be exactly calculated; but it is unlikely to be much below 50 millions.

## Comment:

This is a strange and highly inaccurate paragraph. It implies a surprisingly positivistic attitude to 'the facts'. It gives a totally wrong account of the history of Western study of Soviet forced labour. The following would be more accurate: 'Before Conquest and Solzhenitsyn the discipline, especially in America, was dominated by the work of Dallin and Nicolaevsky, which even Conquest considers to have given an excessively high evaluation of the scale of the camps and repression. The publication of the painstaking work by a few courageous scholars (Jasny and Timoshenko) who tried to establish a more realistic scale was largely ignored. And attempts by Wheatcroft to revive and extend their arguments did not earn him great popularity, although his arguments were eventually vindicated. Most Sovietologists sought to maximise the scale of Terror. *The Soviet authorities did not admit it until the late 1980s*.<sup>64</sup> Stalin, like Hitler, avoided being held responsible for his actions. The total tally of his victims can never be exactly calculated, but is normally considered to have been about 20 million.

## In a footnote 35 Davis states:

For decades, many historians counted Stalin's victims in 'hundreds' or 'thousands', whilst others, such as Solzhenitsyn, talked of 'tens of millions'. Since the collapse of the USSR, the highest estimates have been vindicated. See R. Conquest, *The Great Terror. A Re-assessment* (London, 1992); also Conquest's review of the semi-repentant 'revisionists' (J. Arch Getty & R. Manning (eds), *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives* (Cambridge, 1993)), in *TLS*, February 1994. Yet no precise statistical breakdown has been produced. Studies based on the 'demographic gap' of c.27 million for 1941–45, for example, make no distinction between Soviet citizens killed by the Nazis and those killed by the Soviet regime itself. No proper analysis of losses in the USSR by nationality has been forthcoming. See Norman Davies, 'Neither Twenty Million, nor Russians, nor War Deaths', *Independent*, 29 December 1987; also M. Ellman, 'On Sources: A Note', *Soviet Studies*, 44, 5, 1992, pp. 913–915.

## Comment:

The following is a more accurate version of events:

For decades, many historians counted Stalin's victims in 'tens of millions', which was a figure supported by Solzhenitsyn. Since the collapse of the USSR, the lower estimates of the scale of the camps have been vindicated. The arguments about excess mortality are far more complex than normally believed. R. Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Re-assessment* (London, 1992) does not really get to grips with the new data and continues to present an exaggerated picture of the repression. The view of the 'revisionists' has been largely substantiated (J. Arch Getty & R. T. Manning (eds), *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives* (Cambridge, 1993)).<sup>65</sup> The popular press, even *TLS* and *The Independent*, have contained erroneous journalistic articles that should not be cited in respectable academic articles.

## On p. 963 Davies presents a Capsule on Vorkuta that includes the paragraph:

'Over the years, more human beings perished there [in Vorkuta] than at Auschwitz; and they died slowly, in despair. But few history books remember them'.

Reference to Paul Hollander, 'Soviet Terror, American amnesia', *National Review*, 2 May 1944, pp. 28–39.

## Comment:

The following is a more accurate statement:

TABLE A3.1

NORMAN DAVIES' ESTIMATE OF EXCESS NON-WORLD WAR II DEATHS IN USSR, 1917–1953  
(MILLIONS)

	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
Civil war and Volga famine	3.0	5.0
Political repression of the 1920s	0.05	
Forced collectivisation and dekulakisation after 1929	10.0	14.0
Ukrainian terror-famine, 1932–33	6.0	7.0
Great terror (1934–39) and purges		1.0
Deportation to the Gulag, to 1937	10.0	
Shootings and random executions, 1937–39		1.0
Deportations from E. Poland, Baltic States and Romania, 1939–40		2.0
Foreign POWs: Poles, Finns, Germans, Romanians, Japanese		1.0
Deportations to Gulag, 1939–45		7.0
Deportation of nationalities: Volga Germans, Chechens etc.		1.0
Post-war screening of repatriates and inhabitants of ex-occupied territory	5.0	6.0
Gross total	c.54	

*Notes:* several of these categories overlap; for political repressions in the 1920s I have interpreted 'tens of thousands' as 50 000.

*Source:* Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford, 1996), p. 1329.

'Over the years there was great human suffering in Vorkuta, but it cannot be compared with the scale of Auschwitz'.

Reference to S. G. Wheatcroft, 'The Scale and Nature of German and Soviet Repression and Mass Killings, 1930–45', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 48, 8, 1996, pp. 1319–1353.

And finally (see Table A3.1), on p. 1329, in an appendix on Europe's Estimated Death Toll, 1914–45, there is Table 5, Categories of people killed in Soviet Russia and the Soviet Union 1917–1953 (excluding war losses 1939–45). For sources we are told that this is 'after R. Medvedev and R. Conquest'.

#### Comment:

This cannot be taken seriously. The only redeeming feature of this list is the admission that 'several of these categories overlap'. It is rather unfair of Davies to attribute such figures to R. Medvedev and R. Conquest. In the table Davies lists 29 to 35 million excess deaths in the 1920s and 1930s. Medvedev made estimates of 10 or 12 + million,<sup>66</sup> and Conquest favoured a figure of 20 million.<sup>67</sup> Detailed demographic estimates of excess mortality between the 1926 and 1939 censuses tend to indicate levels of 10 million.<sup>68</sup>

Calculations of excess mortality are extremely difficult and totally depend on what levels of mortality are taken as normal. The USSR was undergoing a massive and extremely rapid demographic transition at this time. The secular mortality rates were generally falling at a very rapid rate during this period. This makes it even more difficult to assign a normal level of mortality.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Robert Conquest, 'Victims of Stalinism: A Comment', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 49, 7, November 1997, pp. 1317–1319, in response to Stephen Wheatcroft, 'The Scale and Nature of German and Soviet Repression and Mass Killings, 1930–45', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 48, 8, December 1996, pp. 1319–1353. Unfortunately I only became aware of this article in early August 1998.

<sup>2</sup> R. Conquest, 'Forced Labour Statistics: Some Comments', *Soviet Studies*, 34, 3, 1982, p. 438,

in response to my article 'On Assessing the Size of Forced Concentration Camp Labour in the Soviet Union, 1929–56', *Soviet Studies*, 33, 2, 1981, pp. 265–295.

<sup>3</sup> The argument would have justified a conclusion of no more than three to four million, but at a moment of excessive caution I wrote four to five million; see *ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>4</sup> See the recent work of Norman Davies, which will be discussed in Appendix 3.

<sup>5</sup> Conquest demonstrates a rather simplistic as well as partisan view on what he expects from the data. No one should expect the data to be perfectly compatible. In fact one should be suspicious if they were. Below I will argue that the scale of the incompatibility is far, far less than Conquest claims, and that this small level of understandable incompatibility should be taken as grounds for even greater faith in these data, and as evidence that they have not been doctored or prepared especially for us.

<sup>6</sup> R. Conquest, *The Great Terror* (Harmondsworth, 1968), Preface, p. 14., 'But the most important consideration remains the mere extent of the Terror'.

<sup>7</sup> See S. G. Wheatcroft, 'Population dynamics and factors affecting them in the USSR', Birmingham University, CREES, Soviet Industrialization Project Series, SIPS, no. 1.

<sup>8</sup> D. J. Dallin & B. I. Nicolaevsky, *Forced Labour in Soviet Russia* (London, Hollis and Carter, 1948), pp. 52–86.

<sup>9</sup> N. S. Timasheff, 'The Post-war population of the Soviet Union', *The American Journal of Sociology*, 54, 1948, pp. 148–155.

<sup>10</sup> N. Jasny, 'Labour and output in Soviet Concentration Camps', *The Journal of Political Economy*, 59, 1952, pp. 415–416, and 'Comments', 60, 1952, p. 340.

<sup>11</sup> I find it bizarre that Conquest is described by Norman Davies as 'courageous' even though he is providing figures that supported the popularly accepted Cold War stereotype favoured at the time. Those who are courageous are those who act against the popular stereotypes of their time, e.g. Jasny in America in 1952 and Danilov in Moscow in 1989.

<sup>12</sup> A. Bergson, *The Real National Income of Soviet Russia since 1928* (Harvard UP, 1961), p. 433.

<sup>13</sup> S. Swianiewicz, *Forced Labour and Economic Development: An enquiry into the experience of Soviet Industrialization* (Oxford, 1965), p. 38 and Appendix A, pp. 699–713.

<sup>14</sup> Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 708. He estimated five million in jail or camp in January 1937 and eight million by late 1938.

<sup>15</sup> I will explain this point in more detail below.

<sup>16</sup> Conquest, *The Great Terror*, pp. 699–702. The Casualty Figures Appendix was removed from the new edition in 1990, but, as we shall see below, Conquest continues to adhere to these conclusions.

<sup>17</sup> Conquest, *ibid.*, p. 705.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 710. 'Taking the conservative figures of an average over the period 1936–50 inclusive of 8 million population of the camps and a 10% death rate per annum, we get a total casualty figure of 12 million dead.

<sup>19</sup> S. Rosefielde, 'An Assessment of the Sources and Uses of Gulag Forced Labour, 1929–56', *Soviet Studies*, 33, 1, 1981, pp. 51–87.

<sup>20</sup> R. W. Davies & S. G. Wheatcroft, 'Rosefielde's Kliukva', *Slavic Review*, December 1980, pp. 593–602, and S. G. Wheatcroft, 'On Assessing the Size of Forced Concentration Camp Labour in the Soviet Union, 1929–56', *Soviet Studies*, 33, 2, 1981, pp. 265–295.

<sup>21</sup> Wheatcroft, *Soviet Studies*, 33, 2, 1981; 35, 2, 1983; and 48, 8, 1996.

<sup>22</sup> R. Conquest, 'Forced Labour Statistics; Some Comments', *Soviet Studies*, 34, 3, 1982, p. 438.

<sup>23</sup> One of the sources that Conquest accused me of not checking was a calculation by S. Voronitsyn in a Radio Liberty *Research Report* to the effect that the disenfranchised population in 1938 was 17.6 million and not the 4.7 million that I claimed. However, on closer investigation Keith Bush from Radio Liberty wrote to me to apologise for Voronitsyn's error in comparing the number of voters in 1939 in the pre-1939 territory of the USSR with the total eligible to vote in 1939 in the post-1945 territory of the Soviet Union. When this was eventually pointed out to Conquest, he wrote to the editors of this journal with an interesting retraction, which included the claim that the difference between 17.7 million and 4.7 million did not materially affect his arguments. See Robert Conquest, 'Letter to the Editor', *Soviet Studies*, 35, 1, 1983, pp. 133–134.

<sup>24</sup> At the height of this discussion I was able to prevail on David Ransel, the editor of *Slavic Review*, to commission two demographers to look into this question. The debate sorely needed a professional input. When they subsequently argued that excess mortality was a complex phenomenon highly dependent upon what was considered 'normal' their views were dismissed by Conquest, who seemed to doubt that demographers had anything to add to this debate. See *Slavic Review*, Fall 1985.

<sup>25</sup> See the forthcoming publication by Robert Johnson, based on the 1996 Toronto Conference on Stalinist demographic data.

<sup>26</sup> See Zemskov in conversation with S. Cholak, in *Argumenty i fakty*, 1989, 45, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> S. G. Wheatcroft, 'More light on the scale of repression and excess mortality in the Soviet Union in the 1930s', *Soviet Studies*, 42, 2, 1990. Alec Nove also wrote about these materials in *Soviet Studies*, 42, 2 and 42, 4, 1990.

<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the worst example of this was in his interview with K. van den Heuvel, 'Testimonies of a non-witness', *Moscow News*, 26 March 1989.

<sup>29</sup> See Danilov, 'Letter to the Editor', *Voprosy istorii*, 1988, 3, pp. 116–121 and Conquest's reply in *Voprosy istorii* and the attack on Danilov in *Moscow News*.

<sup>30</sup> R. Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (1990), p. 311.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 486.

<sup>32</sup> R. Conquest, 'Excess Deaths and Camp Numbers: Some Comments', *Soviet Studies*, 43, 5, 1991, p. 951.

<sup>33</sup> See V. N. Zemskov, 'Ob uchete spetskontingenta NKVD vo vsesoyuznykh perepisyakh naseleeniya 1937 i 1939gg.', *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, 1991, 2, pp. 74–75.

<sup>34</sup> R. Conquest, Letter to the editor, *American Historical Review*, June 1994, p. 1039.

<sup>35</sup> Getty & Rittersporn, 'Letter to the Editor', *American Historical Review*, June 1994. Of course, several of the named figures were not post-Soviet officials, but with that minor qualification, this statement seems to me to be valid.

<sup>36</sup> Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford, 1996), republished as a best-seller by Pimlico in 1997. See Appendix.

<sup>37</sup> These were published first in 1989 in the mass circulation newspaper *Argumenty i fakty*, and from 1991 in the sociological journal *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, and more recently, in English in a joint publication with Arch Getty & Gabor Rittersporn, 'Victims of the Soviet Penal System in the Pre-war Years: A first approach on the Basis of Archival Evidence', *American Historical Review*, October 1993, pp. 1017–1048.

<sup>38</sup> When Zemskov first cited these materials in his articles in 1989–91 they had still not yet been formally declassified and so Zemskov was forced to adhere to the curious rules of the time that did not allow archival citation to be given to un-declassified materials when published. Subsequently these materials have been declassified and his 1996 article, V. N. Zemskov, 'Zaklyuchennyye v 30-e gody (demograficheskii aspekt)', *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, 1996, 7, pp. 3–14 gives full archival references.

<sup>39</sup> This point will be discussed further below.

<sup>40</sup> The convention for most of the 1930s was to include labour colonies (ITK) with prisons in the category 'places of detention', but to exclude the labour camps (ITL).

<sup>41</sup> For Moscow, *Rasstrel'nye spiski*, vyp. 1, 'Donskoe kladbishche, 1934–1940' (Moscow, 1993), vyp. 2, 'Vagan'kovskoe kladbishche, 1926–1936' (Moscow, 1995), and for Leningrad, *Leningradskii Martirolog, 1937–1938*, vol. 1, August–September 1937 (St Petersburg, 1995), vol. 2 October 1937 (St Petersburg, 1996).

<sup>42</sup> Given our explanation of how the series of data were calculated at the local camp level, it is clear that the Gulag authorities would have needed to do something to remove the double counting to arrive at a net inflow figure. Their tables clearly have not done this. This is not conscious distortion, simply statistical practicability.

<sup>43</sup> CR (or K-R in Russian) refers to Counter-Revolutionary. This was the description of crimes charged under article 58 of the 1926 Criminal Code.

<sup>44</sup> I.e. all charges in the criminal code apart from article 58.

<sup>45</sup> Conquest states 25 700 Poles as being shot. This figure actually refers to the 14 700 Polish officers and others in POW camps and the 11 000 CRs held in Western Ukraine and Belorussia, whom Beria asked the Politburo for permission to try in an extra-ordinary manner and shoot. The Politburo did grant permission for this to be done, but as Shelepin later informed Khrushchev, 21 857 were actually shot. All the documents concerning this matter have been reproduced by the Polish Academy of Sciences in W. Materski (ed.), *Katyn: Documents of Genocide: Documents and materials from the Soviet archives turned over to Poland on October 14, 1992* (Warsaw, 1993), pp. 11–25 and 26–29.

<sup>46</sup> Wheatcroft, 'The scale and nature ...', p. 1331.

<sup>47</sup> Krivoshein, *Grif Sekretnosti Snyat*, p. 140.

<sup>48</sup> See 'Les Annees 30: Nouvelles directions de la recherche', *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 39, 1–2, 1998, pp. 197–208.

<sup>49</sup> Khlevnyuk, p. 205.

<sup>50</sup> Wheatcroft, 'The Scale and Nature ...', p. 1351, footnote 37.

<sup>51</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 1327, footnote 19. Let me immediately say that the reduction of the Auschwitz mortality figures does not at all invalidate the overall figures.

<sup>52</sup> See the Getty & Rittersporn, 'Letter to the Editor'.

<sup>53</sup> See Edwin Bacon, *The Gulag at War: Stalin's Forced Labour System in the Light of the Archives* (London, Macmillan, 1994), pp. 36–38.

<sup>54</sup> The case of the late Dmitrii Volkogonov is perhaps most instructive on this matter. In his latest posthumously published book, D. Volkogonov, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Harper-Collins, 1998), Volkogonov had ample opportunity to repeat these figures, if he really thought them correct. But he failed to do so. On p. 153 he cited the Andreev, Darsky & Kharkova results that between 1929 and 1953 'Stalin deprived 21.5 million Soviet citizens of their lives'. But he cited Kruglov's report to Stalin of 2 188 355 prisoners in ITL and ITK in March 1947 (p. 150), and appears to cite approvingly from the Kruglov 1953 report on p. 185, the special board of the NKVD which had condemned 442 531 people to death and long-term imprisonment, for which he provides an archival reference (APRF, f 3, op. 24, d. 435, l. 41). Why would Volkogonov cite this figure in a serious work if he really believed that over seven million had been executed overall, and that 1.75 million had been executed on political charges in 1937 alone?

<sup>55</sup> See *Voennye kadry Sovetskogo gosudarstva v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine, 1941–1945gg.*, Tsifrovii sbornik (Moscow, Voenizdat, 1963), p. 11.

<sup>56</sup> Conquest, *The Great Terror*, pp. 228, 485.

<sup>57</sup> G. A. Kumanev, *Pravda*, 22 July 1989, cited here from A. T. Ukolov, Deputy President of the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court, and V. I. Ivkin, Humanitarian Academy of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, 'O masshtab repressii v krasnoi armii v predvoennye gody', *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1993, 1, p. 56.

<sup>58</sup> These Shchadenko report figures were first published in *Izvestiya TsK KPSS*, 1990, 1, p. 188, and have been discussed widely in the West by Roger R. Reese, 'The Impact of the Great Purge on the Red Army: Wrestling with hard numbers', *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 19, 1–3, 1992, pp. 71–90, and 'The Red Army and the Great Purge', in J. Arch Getty & Roberta T. Manning (eds), *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 198–214, and in Russia by Ukolov & Ivkin, *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1993, 1, pp. 56–59.

<sup>59</sup> See R. W. Davies, M. Tauger & S. G. Wheatcroft, 'Stalin, Grain Stocks and the Famine of 1932–1933', *Slavic Review*, Fall 1995, pp. 642–57. Danilov is now himself aware of this error. But since he never put this preliminary finding into print he has nothing to withdraw.

<sup>60</sup> See S. G. Wheatcroft & R. W. Davies, 'The agricultural crisis of 1931–3', forthcoming (in Russian) in *Otechestvennaya istoriya*, and in English in S. G. Wheatcroft (ed.), *Challenging the Traditional Views of Russian History*, forthcoming (Macmillan).

<sup>61</sup> See Davies, Tauger & Wheatcroft, p. 642.

<sup>62</sup> As I was completing this article my attention was drawn to the first of a series of detailed volumes on different aspects of the Soviet repression produced by Arsenii Roginsky and his team in Memorial, *Repressii protiv Polyakov i Pol'skikh grazhdan. Istoricheskie Sborniki "Memoriala"*, vyp. 1 (Moscow, 1997). Although this volume only concerns repression against Poles in 1937–38 it indicates the wealth of data which the Roginsky team has in its possession. Several sentences are devoted to placing the arrests of the Poles in comparative perspective with all arrests at this time. These sentences indicate that Roginsky and Petrov accept the general level of accuracy of the official arrest figures, which are comparable with their detailed data. See N. V. Petrov & A. B. Roginskii, '“Pol'skaya operatsiya” NKVD 1937–1938gg.', *Repressii protiv Polyakov i Pol'skikh grazhdan*, pp. 32–33. We look forward to seeing more of their material.

<sup>63</sup> Davies, *Europe: A History*. It has generally been given rave reviews. According to the *TLS*, 'No history of Europe in the English Language has been so even-handed in its treatment of East and West'. Felipe Fernandez-Armesto in *The Sunday Times* claimed that, 'It brims with learning, crackles with common sense, coruscates with wit and abounds in good judgement'. Jan Moris in *The Independent* described it as 'A noble monument of scholarship' and claimed that 'There are superb assessments of vastly daunting subjects'. Only in distant Australia did an occasional discerning academic challenge some of his judgements. See Peter McPhee, 'Europe on the brink', *The Age* (Melbourne), 5 April 1997.

<sup>64</sup> Sentences in italics are sentences in the original text which are correct.

<sup>65</sup> Far from being 'semi-repentant', one of their contributors found their introduction a little excessive on the triumphalism. See introduction p. 13, footnote 23, 'The archives thus show that Wheatcroft's previously published estimates of 4 to 5 million prisoners maximum were amazingly accurate'.

<sup>66</sup> See *Moscow News*, 27 November 1988, p. 8–9, *Argumenty i fakty*, 1989, 5, pp. 5–6.

<sup>67</sup> See above.

<sup>68</sup> See estimates of Lorimer, Maksudov and Andreev, Darsky & Kharkova as summarised in S. G. Wheatcroft & R. W. Davies, 'Population', in R. W. Davies, Mark Harrison & S. G. Wheatcroft (eds), *The Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union, 1923–1945* (Cambridge), pp. 72–77.

<sup>69</sup> For a further discussion of this and an attempt to place the Soviet mortality crisis in the perspective of long-term secular mortality decline see S. G. Wheatcroft 'The Great Leap Upwards', *Slavic Review*, forthcoming, 1999.