

THE HUMAN COST OF SOVIET COMMUNISM

PREPARED AT THE REQUEST OF
Senator THOMAS J. DODD

FOR THE

SUBCOMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE THE
ADMINISTRATION OF THE INTERNAL SECURITY
ACT AND OTHER INTERNAL SECURITY LAWS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
UNITED STATES SENATE



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SENATE RESOLUTION 142

Submitted by Mr. Eastland of Mississippi

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES,

Agreed to July 16, 1971.

Resolved, That there be printed as a Senate document the study entitled "The Human Cost of Soviet Communism", prepared by Robert Conquest at the request of the late Senator Thomas J. Dodd for the Internal Security Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, and that there be printed ten thousand additional copies of such document for the use of that committee.

Attest:

FRANCIS R. VALEO,
Secretary.

INTRODUCTION TO THE HUMAN COST OF SOVIET COMMUNISM

By Senator Thomas J. Dodd

Over the past several years, students have been demonstrating, frequently in a riotous manner, in our own country, in France, in Japan, in West Germany and other countries of the free world. The great majority of these demonstrators have not been Communists or Marxists, but misguided idealists. How deep their confusion runs may be gaged from the single fact that, while they claim to be inspired by humanist motivation, their attitude toward communism is generally a tolerant one and frequently sympathetic.

They will tell you that they are opposed to communism for their own country, or that they are critical of it because of its dictatorial aspects. But then they will tell you in the next breath that they have great admiration for Fidel Castro and Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh and even for the Arab terrorists.

And while they may not be prepared to go along with the excesses of the Maoists and of our domestic terrorists, they cling to the belief that Soviet communism represents some kind of brave new world, a gigantic international experiment which deserves the tolerance and even support of every humanist liberal. Somehow they seem to believe that communism, too, is essentially humanist in inspiration and, their excesses notwithstanding, the Communists actually improved the lot of the people wherever they have taken power.

How remote this starry-eyed conception of communism is from reality is underscored in overwhelming detail by this scholarly study of the "Human Cost of Soviet Communism."

The author of this study, Mr. Robert Conquest of London, England, is a scholar who enjoys an international reputation as an expert on Soviet affairs. His recent book, "The Great Terror," is without exception the most definitive work on Stalin's purges of the thirties. It is precisely because of his widely acknowledged expertise in this area that Mr. Conquest was asked by the Senate Subcommittee on Internal Security to prepare this study, which, to our knowledge, is the first document yet published that attempts to assess in a systematic manner the total human cost of Soviet communism.

Mr. Conquest's computations, based on a monumental job of research, comes up with this staggering finding that well over 20,000,000 human beings were executed or killed in other ways by the Soviet Communist authorities since the revolution. Mr. Conquest points out that this is a conservative estimate, which is almost certainly too low and that the real figure might very well be 50 percent greater than this.

Mr. Conquest does not include in this tabulation, although it is the conviction of the undersigned Senator that they belong there, his estimate that the cost of the civil war, from military action, executions, typhus, and famine, totaled 9 million lives, and that the great famine of 1921 which followed the civil war, cost another 5 million lives.

If these figures are added to the figures given above, we come up with a grand total of nearly 35 million human lives as a minimum estimate and 45 million as a more probable estimate.

The Communists believe that the end justifies the means. Even if the Soviet Union had turned out to be the kind of social paradise that Communist propagandists peddle to those they are attempting to deceive, it would still be impossible to argue that any paradise is worth 40 million human lives. But the fact is, as the Judeo-Christian ethic teaches us, that the end cannot be separated from the means, that evil means inevitably beget evil ends.

The mass terror of the Bolsheviks, with its incredible toll in human life and human suffering, instead of producing the promised paradise, not very surprisingly produced a totalitarian state where a ruthless political elite to this day seeks to perpetuate itself in power and to order every aspect of their people's lives.

Instead of opening the way to a more productive and more prosperous future, it created a state-owned system of agriculture which, by destroying human incentive has saddled the Soviet Union with the most backward and unproductive and crisis-ridden agriculture in any major nation.

Instead of producing the great outpouring of artistic imagination and spiritual energy that has characterized the aftermath of every authentic revolution in history, it created an artistic wasteland, where literature and art were reduced to instruments of Communist propaganda, and where those brave souls who sought to break the bonds of the cultural straitjacket were sentenced to prison or forced labor or to the insane asylum.

One of the most telling sections of Mr. Conquest's study is his account of the ideological roots of the Bolshevik terror. The terror was not just something that happened because rank and file revolutionaries got out of hand. On the contrary, as the gruesome quotations from Bolshevik sources establish, organized mass terror was a cardinal tenet of Bolshevik policy, from Lenin and Trotsky down.

For example, Lenin, in his collected works, is quoted as saying: "not a single revolutionary government can dispense with the death penalty for the exploiters (i.e., for the landlords and capitalists.)" And when the Leningrad party in June, 1918, sought to restrain those elements who wished for mass terror, Lenin replied to them with a statement, "This is unheard of. The energy and mass nature of the terror must be encouraged."

Mr. Conquest makes no apology for the czarist regime or its repressive measures. But he nevertheless makes the point that the Bolshevik

dictatorship introduced new horrors that had been unheard of during the worst days of czarist repression—horrors like the execution of hundreds of thousands of people on class grounds; like the taking of hostages; like the shooting of enemy wounded; like the obscene confessional trials in which innocent men accused themselves of crimes they could not possibly have committed; like the mass famine of the thirties deliberately organized for the purpose of crushing peasant resistance; or like the Stalinist system of forced labor camps which, over a period of some 20 years, housed an average population in excess of 8 million a year, and where the death rate averaged at the very least 10 percent a year.

Mr. Conquest, in his summary, makes the point, that in concentrating on the mortality statistics,

* * * it would surely be wrong to forget the vast amount of unquantifiable human misery resulting from, indeed part of, this same process. The suffering of wives whose husbands disappeared, the children who were orphaned, cannot be counted. The spiritual cost of being forced to denounce one's own parents, the mental torment of lying in fear of unjust arrest and death night after night for months or years, is not subject to measurement.

In his study Mr. Conquest details the stubborn refusal of a certain category of Western liberals to accept the facts about the Soviet terror during the thirties and forties.

Even after Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin confirmed all the essential charges that had been made against the Soviet regime, there were men of good will in the Western world who refused to believe that the Communist regime could be so evil. They refused to believe, because it was difficult for them to conceive of horror and brutality on such a mass scale. And this refusal to face up to the reality of Soviet communism has carried over to the present day.

I can think of no more eloquent commentary on the theme of this study than the words written by a prominent Lithuanian Jewish leader, Dr. Julius Margolin, who regarded himself as a friend of the Soviet Union prior to World War II and who learned something about the true nature of Soviet communism when, together with hundreds of thousands of other Lithuanians, he was deported to the slave labor camps of Siberia after the Soviet occupation of his country. When he was released after 7 years in the camps, this is what Dr. Margolin wrote:

Until the fall of 1939, I had assumed a position of benevolent neutrality toward the U.S.S.R. * * * The last 7 years have made me a convinced and ardent foe of the Soviet system. I hate this system with all the strength of my heart and all the power of my mind. Everything I have seen there has filled me with horror and disgust which will last until the end of my days. I feel that the struggle against this system of slavery, terrorism, and cruelty which prevails there constitutes the primary obligation of every man in this world. Tolerance or support of such an international shame is not permissible for people who are on this side of the Soviet border and who live under normal conditions. * * *

Millions of men are perishing in the camps of the Soviet Union. * * * Since they came into being, the Soviet camps have swallowed more people, have executed more victims, than all the other camps—Hitler's included—together; and this lethal engine continues to operate full blast.

And those who in reply only shrug their shoulders and try to dismiss the issue with vague and meaningless generalities, I consider moral abettors and accomplices of banditry.

It is to be hoped that Mr. Conquest's study will help to set the record straight for many years to come by making available to all those who have not completely closed their minds a factual compilation, so brief that it can be read in less than an hour's time, and so compelling that no person who considers himself a humanist and who takes the trouble to read it will ever again be able to regard the Communist system with sympathy or even with benevolent neutrality.

We are indebted to Mr. Conquest for the preparation of this extraordinary study and to the Macmillan Company for permission to reprint Appendix A, "The Great Terror."

THE HUMAN COST OF SOVIET COMMUNISM

By Robert Conquest

THE ROOTS OF TERROR

In dealing with the various waves of oppression which have swept the Soviet Union, we should not fail to remark that the idea of terror was deeply rooted in the whole Bolshevik conception of rule.

Lenin had written a theoretical justification of it as early as 1905, when he envisaged the use of terror in the style of 1793 "to settle accounts with Tsarism" after the revolution.¹ In 1908 he wrote of "real, nationwide terror, which reinvigorates the country and through which the Great French Revolution achieved glory."²

One of his closest adherents, Bonch-Bruyevich, wrote long after the revolution: "We were all long ago mentally prepared for the period when we would have to defend the achievements of the dictatorship of the proletariat * * * by using one of the most radical and effective means of our revolutionary struggle—the red terror."³ Another, Lenin's favourite Bolshevik historian, Pokrovsky, was able to say that the secret police "sprang from the very essence of the proletarian revolution" and that the terror was the "inevitable consequence" of that revolution.⁴ Many similar pronouncements could be cited. Meanwhile it is worth quoting Lenin at a key moment, on the eve of the seizure of power, proposing the death penalty for whole social groups: "Not a single revolutionary government can dispense with the death penalty for the exploiters (i.e., for the landlords and capitalists)."⁵

THE FIRST PHASE: 1917-24

On December 20, 1917, came the founding of the CHEKA—the secret police—which under its various names has been a recognizedly important component of the regime ever since. In theory it did not at first have the right to execute. Whatever Lenin's own wishes, neither the party nor its supporters were yet fully prepared for a bloodbath. The mood was changed fairly gradually.

An announcement on December 13, 1917, which had branded the whole of the liberal Constitutional Democratic Party as "enemies of the people" whose leaders were "outside the law," led to the lynching of two of their ex-ministers in a Petrograd hospital on January 20. This sort of thing had already been excused, as by Trotsky when he had announced on December 15, 1917, that there would be "moments of popular fury" brought on themselves by the Constitutional Democrats and that "not one of us will undertake to say that the people, if pushed to the extreme, will refrain from this final measure." On January 27, 1918, Lenin publicly announced—though at this stage about speculators only—that they should be shot on the spot and that "we can achieve nothing unless we use terror." On February 23, 1918, Pravda published an announcement that the Cheka could "see no

¹ "Collected Works," 3d Russian edition, vol. 8, p. 62.

² "Collected Works," 4th Russian edition, vol. 13, p. 435.

³ Na boyevikh postakh fevral'skoi i oktyabr'skoi revoliutsii, Moscow 1930, pages 177-8.

⁴ Pravda, Dec. 18, 1927.

⁵ "Collected Works," 4th Russian edition, vol. 25, p. 316.

other method of fighting counter-revolutionaries, spies, speculators, looters, hooligans, saboteurs, and other parasites than their merciless destruction on the spot." It was the following day that the first known case of shooting without trial by the Cheka took place.

It was at this point that the Left Social Revolutionaries, who were then still included in the Soviet Government, protested. Lenin ruled them out of order when they tried to bring the matter up in the Council of People's Commissars. Four hundred anarchists are reported sentenced by the Cheka's three-man courts in April 1918 in Moscow alone.

Early in June 1918, the secret police Chief Felix Dzerzhinsky announced openly of the Cheka, "We stand for organized terror," while Lenin himself continually insisted on intensified terror, against the judgment of many of his subordinates. For example, as early as June 1918, he intervened against the Petrograd party's error in restraining elements who wished for mass terror: "this is unheard of! The energy and mass nature of the terror must be encouraged."⁶ In August he had similarly to call on the Nizhni Novgorod Soviet "to apply mass terror immediately, to execute and exterminate hundreds of prostitutes, drunken soldiers, former officers, etc."⁷ And so on.

Reasons given for execution in the Soviet press included simply describing the dead man as "a cunning and crafty counter-revolutionary," or "having used his premises for intrigue against the Soviet." Others were simply down as "shot in the ordinary course of the Red terror," or as "an ex-member of the Constitutional Democratic Party," or as "a counterrevolutionary by conviction." The sculptor, Ukhtomsky, was charged with transmitting information about the condition of Russian museums.

Scores of well-authenticated cases of the most revolting brutality and the most degrading tortures, the execution of innocent hostages including women and children, and so forth, could be produced. Rather than provide what is nowadays all too often the staple of rival atrocity propagandas, we would refer students to such books as "The Red Terror in Russia," by S. P. Melgounov, a prominent Social Revolutionary, while the Soviet classic "And Quiet Flows the Don," by Mikhail Sholokhov, gives a vivid if incomplete picture of Bolshevik brutality at this time—and also makes it clear that these terrorist tactics, far from bringing political benefit, turned hitherto acquiescent populations against the regime.

One particularly well investigated case is, of course, the execution of the Czar and his family on July 16, 1918. It could be argued that the Czar and Czaritsa had—by Bolshevik standards at least—committed political offenses in their capacity as ruler and adviser. This was scarcely applicable to the young haemophiliac Czarevich, not yet 14. In his case, the argument was that on the death of his father, he would become the true Czar for the monarchists. But even this argument could not apply to the young Grand Duchesses—aged 23, 21, 19, and 17; for under the Romanov law of succession they and their descendants had no right to the throne. Still less can a case be made for the execution of the Czar's family doctor and the three servants shot at the same time. Even less, it might be thought, could the royal spaniel be held responsible.

⁶ "Collected Works," 4th Russian edition, vol. 35, p. 275.

⁷ "Collected Works," 4th Russian edition, vol. 35, p. 286.

This execution was carried out, after careful preparation, by the established Bolshevik authorities using an official Cheka squad, and as such, is instructive about what may be regarded as a comparatively mild example of the methods and attitudes of the time. It was not accompanied by the sometimes literally obscene brutalities reported elsewhere. Most of the victims died quickly, though the maid had to be chased round the cellar and bayoneted, and the Czarevich and one of the Grand Duchesses had to be finished off with boots, rifle butts, and bayonets. All other members of the family on whom the Bolsheviks could lay their hands were similarly executed—sometimes in worse circumstances. The Grand Duchess Elizabeth, a nun since her husband's death in 1905, with five other members of the family, including three young boys, were thrown down an abandoned mine shaft and heavy timbers and hand grenades hurled after them. This all took place at a time when the civil war had barely started, and when the main anti-Bolshevik force on the front concerned was the Czechoslovak Legion, against whom serious allegations of terrorism were never made. And, as Trotsky later admitted, the killings took place on the express instructions of the Soviet leadership.

The attempt on Lenin's life in late August, followed by the assassination of Uritsky, were the occasion for increasing the terror and for extending the power of the Cheka. First, 500 hostages were executed.⁸ On September 5, 1918, came the famous decree "On the Red Terror."⁹ Under it the Cheka was to be strengthened by sending a large number of Party members into it; concentration camps were to be set up; anyone in contact with counterrevolutionary organizations was to be shot; and the names and reasons for executions were to be published. At the same time Latsis explained that under it the prisoner was to be asked "to what class he belongs, what is his origin, his education and profession. It is those questions that should decide the fate of the defendant—therein lies the meaning of red terror."¹⁰

Not all party members at first accepted all this. Resistance came from a majority of the local Soviets whose opinions were canvassed in 1918.¹¹ A leading Old Bolshevik, the journalist Olminsky, wrote several critical pieces in "Pravda" making it clear that a section of the Party opposed the extensive executions then being carried out and felt that the powers of the Cheka were greatly excessive. He also protested on one occasion against the scandalous and inhuman behavior of one of the local Chekas which had stripped and flogged a number of peasants.¹² (The Cheka's own organ had already printed letters from local Chekists demanding that torture be added to execution. They protested against the release of Robert Bruce Lockhart, the British diplomat then under arrest on charges of conspiracy, urging that he should instead have been subjected to "tortures, the very description of which would have filled counterrevolutionaries with cold terror.")¹³

Prominent Chekists counterattacked. Lenin backed them up. He attacked "a narrowminded intelligentsia" in the Party who "sob and

⁸ *Izvestia*, September 3, 1918.

⁹ RSFSR Laws, 1918, p. 65-710.

¹⁰ For a discussion see Merle Fainsod, "How Russia is Ruled," Cambridge, 1953 Ch. 13.

¹¹ "Soviet Affairs," No. 1, p. 16, St. Antony's Papers.

¹² "Pravda," December 19, 1918.

¹³ "Yezhedelnik," No. 3, October 16, 1918.

fuss" over mistakes made by the Cheka; adding "when we are reproached with cruelty, we wonder how people can forget the most elementary Marxism."¹⁴ But he admitted that "it is quite understandable that alien elements should attach themselves to the Cheka." This early hint that unpleasant characters were getting into the secret police is supported by its own officials, who conceded, moreover, that the work corrupted even the better elements. One wrote, "Work in the Cheka, conducted in an atmosphere of physical coercion, attracts corrupt and outright criminal elements. . . ." ¹⁵ Dzerzhinsky himself remarked, "Only saints or scoundrels can serve in the GPU, but now the saints are running away from me and I am left with the scoundrels."¹⁶

Though the party at the center was responsible for insisting on mass terror, many of the worst acts were committed on individual initiative. To waver in ruthlessness was to waver in loyalty, or was so taken. But it is also true that in the localities power fell into the hands of men more or less self-selected within the turmoil on the basis of ruthlessness and brutality. As in all cases when authority collapses, and power passes locally into the hands of small groups, energetic antisocial elements came to hand as the instrument of the new regime. (Friedrich Engels, cofounder of Marxism, had once written to Marx himself, deploring the excesses of the French Revolution, and describing the "mob of riffraff who know how to profit from the Terror.") Common criminals formed an important proportion of the new terror squads and killer groups: some of them, indeed, were to make high careers in the secret police (for example, E. G. Evdokimov, later prominent in producing the first of the faked "confession" trials). This attachment of unsavory characters to the ruling party and particularly to the secret police was passed off as an unfortunate necessity.

While it is true and relevant that red and white terrors alternated in the areas changing hands in the Civil War, it seems clear that in general the former was the worse of the two. Above all, while the whites shot commissars and Communists, and there were many occasions on which they ran amok in a more general way, it was only by the Bolshevik side that, as a matter of policy, people were executed who had not been involved in any way in helping their enemies, but simply on class grounds. It was at this time, too, that the hostage system was instituted. The wives and children of officers serving in the Red Army were held as sureties for their loyalty. And, in general, wives and families of "bourgeois" who had evaded arrest were often seized and executed in their stead.

The war casualties proper cannot, in the strictest sense, be put into our account of the deaths consciously inflicted by the Bolsheviks—though it may be felt that the seizure of power by a minority group, and its determination to extirpate all opposition, should be considered the main cause of that war. Even leading Bolsheviks noted, as did 10 peoples commissars, resigning from the government as early as 1917, that the rejection of a coalition government meant "government by means of political terror," while another (Emilian Yaroslavsky) denounced statements by "responsible leaders" that "for one of ours

¹⁴ "Pravda," December 18, 1918

¹⁵ Martin Latsis "The Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution," Moscow, 1921.

¹⁶ Isaac Deutscher, "The Prophet Unarmed," p. 109.

we shall kill five opponents," as part and parcel of Lenin's "regime of the bayonet and the sabre."¹⁷

It is also true that battle casualties were light, and the main killings were of prisoners and enemy civilian sympathizers. In August 1918 Latsis announced that in the civil war then starting, enemy wounded would be shot.¹⁸ A Soviet source estimates the total excess mortality in those provinces where statistics were kept as about 7 million between January 1918 and July 1920.¹⁹ An estimate for the remaining areas should bring this up to about 9 million. These deaths were largely from typhus and famine—though the great famine of 1921 with its 5-million-odd deaths,²⁰ had not yet come.

These casualties might be labeled as resulting from the revolution in a general sense. But the figures for actual execution (and death in camps and prisons) of the period up till 1924 is of course far lower. Though official figures are both self-contradictory and admittedly incomplete, it can be deduced that a minimum of 200,000 official executions must have taken place in the period 1917-23. This omits two main sources of death. First, those shot out of hand after the putting down of various "rebellions"—245 such risings are officially given for 1918 alone, while 99 are listed in only 20 provinces (constituting about a third of Bolshevnik-controlled territory) in 7 months of 1919. And second, those dying as a result of prison and camp treatment. Together, these are conservatively estimated to have accounted for at least twice as many lives as the executions proper. If we put forward a total of 500,000 victims for the period we shall certainly be erring on the side of underestimation.²¹ It is, of course, true that several million of the most intransigent of the regime's opponents had escaped into exile (and the executions in the Crimea, after the hasty final evacuation had left behind a particularly large concentration of bourgeois and white guards, was by far the most unrestrained of all the Bolshevnik terror operations.)

In March 1921 came the crushing by the Communists of the rebellion of their own sailors at Kronstadt. Among the rebel's complaints was that the regime had "brought the workers, instead of freedom, an ever present fear of being dragged into the torture chambers of the Cheka, which exceeds by many times in its horrors the gendarmerie administration of the Tsarist regime."²²

With this, and the crushing of large scale peasant rebellions in the Volga basin and elsewhere, the regime found itself with no serious internal opponents. By the New Economic Policy launched in 1921, Lenin had reverted from the rigors of purist Bolshevnik policy to the toleration of a good deal of economic liberty and relaxation. The first problem now was that these new policies showed that the moderate socialist parties had been right all along. In the towns the Mensheviks had begun to gather strength, and it became clear that the workers supported them. In the countryside the peasants remained massively attached to the Social Revolutionary Party. Even within the Com-

¹⁷ "1917," by Leon Trotsky, Moscow 1924, pp. 355, 358.

¹⁸ "Izvestia," August 23, 1918.

¹⁹ L. Kritsman, "The Heroic Period of the Revolution," 2d edition, Moscow 1926, p. 187.

²⁰ Large Soviet Encyclopedia, 1st edition, vol. 5, p. 463.

²¹ The most thorough discussion of these figures is to be found in "The Guillotine at Work," by G. P. Maximoff, Chicago 1940. See also Martin Latsis, "Dva goda borby na vnutrennom fronte," Moscow 1920 and "The Cheka," by E. J. Scott, in St. Anthony's Papers, No. 1, 1956.

²² "Izvestia of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee of Sailors, Red Army Men and Workers of the Town of Kronstadt," March 8, 1921, No. 6.

munist Party itself, oppositions favoring concessions to the workers and to democracy arose. The choice before Lenin was to come to terms with these forces or to crush them. He chose the latter. Even those sections of the other parties which had supported the Bolsheviks, however reluctantly, in the Civil War, were now made illegal. There were mass trials of Menshevik and Social Revolutionary leaders. The main trial of the latter, which took place in 1922, was notable in the first place as a faint adumbration of the later Stalinist trials, in that half the defendants were agents provocateurs, and the court (which was headed by the purely political figure Pyatakov) was merely a party agency. Under very strong pressure from the European socialist parties, a Bolshevik delegation agreed that there should be no executions. This was contrary to Lenin's instructions, and he was extremely angry, saying that it was essential that the leaders should be shot. In the end they received death sentences, suspended until further notice. Some of them lasted as late as the 1930's: but in any case all of them eventually perished. In the same year, when things were settling down, and emergency action was giving way to codification, Lenin again came out formally for terror, ordering the Commissar for Justice to work on the basis of "the justification of terror and its indispensibility * * * the court must not abolish terror * * * but must substantiate it and legalise it in principle."²³

TERROR IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Nevertheless the period 1924-29 was one of comparative relaxation. Under the new policy the peasantry regained their prewar level of prosperity, and Russian industry was rebuilt. However, it remained contrary to all the principles of the Communist Party that a free, property-owning peasantry should continue to exist for very long. "Moderate" voices within the party, such as Bukharin's, said that the betteroff peasants could of course be "hounded down at will," but urged caution in bringing the main body under control. However, these men were easily defeated by Stalin, supported by the great majority of the party, and even by those who opposed him on other grounds. In 1929 the decision was taken to eliminate the richer peasants (kulaks) and to force the remainder into collective farms, where they would be economically and physically under the control of the State.

The first attempt, in the early months of 1930, led to hundreds of peasants risings. Casualties in this phase are not known, but certainly ran into tens of thousands. But the peasants responded not only "with the shotgun," but also by slaughtering half Russia's livestock, and by March, the policy was in ruins, and the attempt was called off.

By a far better prepared combination of ruthlessness and economic measures, the almost complete collectivization of the bulk of the country was again attained by the end of 1932. Resistance was now met by a simple method. If the peasant had produced only enough for his own subsistence, leaving none for the State, local enforcement officials reversed that procedure. The last sacks of grain were taken from the barns for export while famine raged. Butter was sent abroad while the Ukranian infants were dying for lack of milk.²⁴

²³ "Collected Works," 2d Russian edition, vol. 27, p. 296-7.

²⁴ Grain export during the early thirties was higher than at any time since the revolution, running at around 5 million tons a year in 1930-31, and a million-and-three-quarters even in the famine years of 1932-33. In 1929-30 it had been less than 200,000 tons.

The famine can be blamed quite flatly on Stalin. The crop in 1932 was about 12 percent below the average. This was far from being famine level. But procurements of food from the peasantry was up by 44 percent. The result was, and could not have been other than, large-scale starvation. It is perhaps the only case in history of a purely man-made famine—man-made, not in the sense that it was due to faulty policies, but quite literally, in that the food was there and men took it away.

It is also the only major famine whose very existence was ignored or denied by the governmental authorities, and even to a large degree successfully concealed from world opinion. The process by which this happened is a very unfortunate one, involving political reactions which are still with us to this day. It was not, of course, possible to make the concealment absolute. It was widely known in Moscow, and even the low-level government official occasionally spoke of it to a foreigner. Some foreigners—including Malcolm Muggeridge and Gareth Jones, Lloyd George's secretary—even penetrated the famine area and saw for themselves. But (and this of course applies to the whole of the period's oppressions) the information was naturally taken up and given widest publicity in the West by those most hostile to the Soviet Union in principle. By a common—though thoughtless and unfortunate—reaction, leftwing and even moderate circles were able to persuade themselves that the story was untrue or (a much easier view) greatly exaggerated. The Soviet Government had not admitted it. Occasionally specially shepherded travellers (for example, Sir John Maynard) had been taken to prepared spots in the area and had generalized from that. Certain journalists (e.g. Walter Duranty) who were fully aware of the facts and recounted them in private conversation, played them down in order not to offend the Soviet Government and lose their visas and their positions.

The Soviet authorities, as far as can be seen, let through only one accidental admission—an accusation that members of the People's Commissariat of Agriculture then on trial for sabotage had used their positions "to create a famine in the country."²⁵ The Ukrainian President Petrovsky told a Western correspondent that millions were dying.²⁶ Thirty years later, there was a brief lifting of the curtain in the Soviet press—in the novel "People Are Not Angels," by Ivan Stadnyuk,²⁷ who summed up: "The men died first, then the children, and finally the women."

As is always the case when the authorities will not provide information, nor permit research into the relevant archives, it is not easy to estimate the casualties. A careful examination of all the estimates, and all the accounts, seems to show that about 5 million deaths from hunger and from the diseases of hunger is the best estimate.²⁸ Only one famine, listed in the "Encyclopedia Britannica," (that of China in 1877-78) is cited as more destructive.

The Mensheviks had already in 1930 quoted a "prominent Communist" as saying that to bring socialism to the villages "we must destroy 5 million people."²⁹ The estimate seems to have been correct. This is on

²⁵ In "Izvestia," March 12, 1933.

²⁶ Fred E. Beal, "Word from a Native," London, 1937, pp. 254-5.

²⁷ "Neva" No. 12, 1962.

²⁸ The evidence for the Ukrainian famine of 1932-34 is exhaustively considered in an article in "Soviet Studies" of January 1964 and a further note in the April 1965 issue of the same journal, by Dana G. Dalrymple.

²⁹ "Sotsialisticheski Vestnik," Nos. 6-7, 1930.

the scale of the losses in the 1921 famine. Then, however, the authorities concealed nothing, and welcomed the large-scale Western aid program under Herbert Hoover. In 1933, the attempts of various charitable committees to repeat this effort were simply rebuffed.

Of the 5 million odd who perished, more than 3 million were in the Ukraine; Kazakhstan, the North Caucasus and the Middle Volga also suffered particularly heavily.³⁰ Even on official figures, the Ukraine's population had sunk from 31 million to 28 million between 1926 and 1939. The OGPU figures sent to Stalin seem to have given deaths from starvation alone as 3,300,000 to 3,500,000.³¹ Even higher estimates are said to have been given by Skrypnik and Balitsky to an American Communist.³²

Starvation was compounded by terror. Arbitrary rule by party gangs flourished. But in any case, normal process of law was Draconian: for example, a law of August 1932, imposed a sentence of 10 years imprisonment for any theft, however small, of grain. Already, deportation quotas were laid down for different areas.³³

Execution also played its part. Stalin later told Churchill that 10 million "kulaks" had to be dealt with, and that "the great bulk" were "wiped out," others being transferred to Siberia.³⁴ Some 3 million seem to have ended up in the newly expanding labor camp system. All in all, we can scarcely put the total deathroll of famine and deportation at less than 7 million, and it may well have been higher.

There seems little doubt that the main issue was simply crushing the peasantry at any cost. The Ukrainian Second Secretary Khatayevich put it that the 1933 harvest "was a test of our strength and their endurance. It took a famine to show them who is master here. It has cost millions of lives, but the collective farm system is here to stay. We have won the war."³⁵ This ruthless attitude was further corrupting the party.

During the revolution, Bukharin said, he had seen "things that I would not want even my enemies to see. Yet, 1919, cannot even be compared with what happened between 1930 and 1932. In 1919, we were fighting for our lives. We executed people, but we also risked our lives in the process. In the later period, however, we were conducting a mass annihilation of completely defenseless men, together with their wives and children." But he was even more concerned at the "deep changes in the psychological outlook of those Communists who participated in this campaign and, instead of going mad, became professional bureaucrats for whom terror was henceforth a normal method of administration, and obedience to any order from above a high virtue." He spoke of a "real dehumanization."³⁶

This progressive brutalization was reflected in the next phase.

THE SUPERTERROR

The terror against the peasantry had scarcely come to an end when an event took place which marked the transition to a new form of

³⁰ Frank Lorimer, "The Population of the Soviet Union (History and Prospects)," League of Nations, Geneva, 1946.

³¹ Alexander Orlov, "The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes," London 1954, p. 42.

³² Boris Souvarine, "Stalin," London, 1939, p. 670.

³³ The Smolensk Archives in Merle Fainsod "Smolensk Under Soviet Rule," Cambridge 1958.

³⁴ Winston S. Churchill, "The Second World War," vol. IV, pp. 447-8.

³⁵ Victor Kravchenko, "I Chose Freedom," London 1947, p. 130.

³⁶ Boris I. Nicolaevsky, "Power and the Soviet Elite," New York, New York, 1965, p. 18.

terror—against the population as a whole, and in particular against the ruling party itself. On December 1, 1934, Stalin procured the murder in Leningrad of his close comrade and assistant, Sergei Kirov. This was followed by the instant execution of a large number of alleged anti-Soviet prisoners in Leningrad, Moscow, and Kiev. A few weeks later a group of local young Communists were executed for the murder. And over the following year, a frameup was gradually worked out to implicate Stalin's former rivals for power within the party.

The show trials

In 1928, the case of the 53 Shakhty engineers had established the principle of requiring certain prisoners, for reasons of state, to confess in open court to imaginary crimes. The trial opened amid a press campaign of "Death to the Wreckers!" the 12-year-old son of one of the accused being among the demanders of the death penalty. Ten of the prisoners made full confessions, and six others partial ones. No other evidence was produced. A slight hitch was immediately evident. One of the prisoners did not appear in dock. He had, his counsel explained, gone mad. Then the prosecutor, Krylenko, "narrowing his eyes and twisting his lips into a sneer," viciously attacked the engineers. One accused, Benbenko, tried to withdraw his confession. He had been in the hands of the GPU for almost a year.

"I scarcely knew what I signed * * * I was driven to distraction by threats, so I signed * * * I tried to withdraw before the trial, but * * *"

Krylenko gazed at him and finally said quietly, "Do you want to say that you were intimidated, threatened?"

Benbenko hesitated, and then said "No".³⁷

Another of the accused, Skorutto, had denied his guilt from the beginning. One evening he was reported too ill to attend. Next morning he appeared, "an ash-grey trembling figure," and said that the previous night he had confessed his guilt and the guilt of others. There was a woman's cry from the public benches, "Kolya, darling, don't lie. Don't! You know you are innocent!" The prisoner burst into tears and collapsed into a chair. After a 10-minute recess he was brought back and said that though he had confessed he had withdrawn his confession earlier that morning. Krylenko went in to the attack. Under intense badgering, Skorutto said that he had not slept for eight nights, and finally he had lied about his friends as they had lied about him. He had hoped that the court would be more lenient if he pled guilty. But he was not guilty. Next morning, Skorutto reaffirmed his confession and said that it had been his wife's outcry which had shaken his resolve to admit his guilt.³⁸

And so the trial proceeded. Another of the accused failed to appear and it was announced that he had committed suicide. An American present remarked that these flashes of illumination—the madness, the suicide, the withdrawals and reassertions of confession—"left us limp with the impact of horrors half-glimpsed * * * How did men like Krylenko, who sneered and snarled while the world looked on, behave when there were no witnesses and no public records?"³⁹

Eleven death sentences were announced, of which six were commuted because of the prisoners' cooperation.

³⁷ Eugene Lyons, "Assignment in Utopia," London, 1938, pp. 123-124.

³⁸ Lyons, pp. 124-126.

³⁹ Lyons, p. 117.

The Shakhty trial was followed by a number of other public spectacles of the same type but under increasingly better stage management—notably the Menshevik trial of 1931, and the Metro-Vic trial of 1933—and culminated in the three great “Moscow Trials” against Stalin’s opponents or unenthusiastic supporters within the party.

In August 1936 came the first of these. Grigory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev—Lenin’s closest collaborators and 14 others publicly confessed to having organised the Kirov murder, and were all executed.

In January 1937, after the leading member of the Politburo still opposed to these methods, Sergo Ordzhonikidze, had been killed or forced to commit suicide, a similar trial took place. Yuri Pyatakov and others were executed for a plot which had involved Pyatakov flying to Norway to receive instructions from Trotsky, then in Oslo. (It was proved while the trial was still in progress that no aeroplane had in fact landed at or near Oslo during the month of the alleged visit.) In June, Marshal Tukhachevsky and other leading officers were shot after a short closed trial on charges of being agents of Fascism. This was followed by a vast purge in the Army which accounted for about half the officer corps, and in particular almost all the generals. Most of them seem not to have been “tried” at all; for example, we are told of Marshal Blyukher that “continuous interrogation broke down the health of this virile man” and that he was dead within 3 weeks of arrest.⁴⁰

In March 1938, a further trial ensued, that of Nikolai Bukharin, described by Lenin as “the darling of the party,” Alexei Rykov (former Prime Minister of the Soviet Union) and others. They were charged with treason, terrorism, sabotage, espionage, and various other crimes. In particular, they had used several prominent Moscow doctors to poison various figures (including the writer, Maxim Gorky). Dr. Pletnev, the pride of the Russian medical profession, was not easily brought to confess to have murdered one of his more prominent patients. It had been necessary, a whole year previously, to arrest him and try him in secret on a faked charge of having sexually assaulted a woman patient—actually a NKVD provocateur; in this case, contrary to Soviet practice in sexual cases, this had been given enormous publicity and every conceivable disgrace heaped on his name.

Police methods

Confessions, though in their case only written ones, were also required from the millions of ordinary prisoners who did not go to public trial. Naturally, in neither case were they obtained by humane methods. Torture (retrospectively authorized by a decree of the Central Committee of January 20, 1939); the “conveyor,” continuous interrogation without sleep for up to 7 days; and, for the publicly tried, a long-drawn out breaking down of the will and personality over a period of months, these were the means employed.

A Soviet general describes his torture:

I accidentally found out that my fiend of an interrogator’s name was Stolbunsky *** Apart from him, two brawny torturers took part in the interrogation. Even now my ears ring with the sound of Stolbunsky’s evil voice hissing “You’ll sign, you’ll sign!” as I was carried out, weak and covered in blood. I withstood

⁴⁰ V. Dushenkin, “Ot Soldata do Marshala,” Moscow, 1964, p. 223.

the torture during the second bout of interrogation, but when the third started, how I longed to be able to die! ⁴¹

A physicist tells us that the conveyor was "as painful as any torture." The groins swell, and violent pains set in. After 2 or 3 days the prisoner is actually being physically poisoned by fatigue. ⁴²

Neither the general nor the scientist were brought to public trial. And this was true of the vast majority who now fell to the most concentrated terror operation of them all—the "Yezhovshchina" of 1936-38, called after Stalin's latest head of the Secret Police, Nikolai Yezhov.

1936-38: MASS ARRESTS AND EXECUTIONS

The number of arrests in 1936-38 can be estimated by a variety of methods. And although exact precision cannot be obtained, and should not be expected, every train of evidence and argument tends to a figure of about 7 million.

The prisons, during 1938, held about a million inmates. The sufferings due to overcrowding may be judged from an account published in Budapest in 1965, by the Hungarian writer, Jozsef Lengyel. He describes his cell in Moscow's Butyrka Prison, then holding about 30,000 inmates, 275 men lived "in, between and under 25 iron bedsteads." (All the same this was better than the cell in which he was softened up for interrogation.) ⁴³ There are many similar accounts. The punishment cells were worse, amounting to the literal immuring of the victim.

The labor camp population at this time (which included numbers who had started their sentences in the pre-1936 period) can be estimated at about 8 million.

The death rate in the camps was high—especially before they were to some extent rationalized in 1950-1951. Throughout the whole camp system (omitting the little known extermination camps of the far north) it seems never to have been below 10 percent per annum and often seems to have been considerably higher. If we take the conservative figures of an average camp death rate of 10 percent and an average camp population of 8 million, over the whole Stalin period not less than 12 million people must have died in the camps.

Though, as we have said, precise figures cannot be obtained, there is no longer any doubt whatever that the casualties were of the order described. Similar estimates have been given by Academician Andrei Sakharov, the Soviet physicist. And they have, for example, been accepted by prominent Communists like Roger Garaudy, when still a member of the politburo of the French Communist Party. The usual cause of death was dystrophy, due to progressive starvation. Rations remained inadequate for work—they were considerably lower than in the notorious Japanese prisoner-of-war camps on the River Kwai, for example.

The number of people actually executed in this period was something over a million. We are told by Academician Sakharov that 600,000 party members alone were actually shot, quite apart from a further 550,000 to 600,000 who died in labor camps—that is, together, a total of about half the party membership. ⁴⁴

⁴¹ Gorbatov, General A. V., "Years of My Life," English edition, London 1966, p. 113.

⁴² Alexander Weissberg, "Conspiracy of Silence," London, 1962, p. 236.

⁴³ Jozsef Lengyel, "From Beginning to End," English edition, London 1966, p. 14.

⁴⁴ Andrei D. Sakharov, "Progress, Coexistence and Intellectual Freedom," English edition, London 1968, p. 55.

In addition to the executions, and the ordinary sentences to the forced labor camps, where the death rate was high but random, there was an intermediate sentence. This was of forced labor without the right of correspondence. No labor camp survivor is known to have ever met any one serving such a sentence. Some of those receiving it were simply shot on the spot. Others seem to have been taken to the death camps on the Tamyр Peninsula and Novaya Zemlya, of which very little is known to this day. It seems, in any case, that they were there killed when convenient. Academician Sakharov says that in them thousands of prisoners were machinegunned because of overcrowding, or as the result of special orders.⁴⁵

Unlike the assault on the peasantry, this phase of the terror struck everywhere. The party itself, as we have seen, suffered enormously, as did the officer corps. Another category which did badly was the creative intelligentsia. With all the death and emigration which had taken place among them, those who remained may still be thought to have stood for permanent human values not easily assimilable to Stalin. Many of the greatest perished: the great prose writers Isaac Babel and Boris Pilnyak; the great producer Vsevolod Meyerhold and the great poet Osip Mandelstam; Nikolai Vavilov, Russia's great biologist and all his distinguished subordinates. Writers suffered particularly: at least 600, Alexander Solzhenitsyn tells us, went to the camps or execution cellars. Scientists, too; of the eight chiefs of the U.S.S.R.'s main physics institute, at Kharkov, only one escaped. All 13 of the successive heads of the Kiev University Academy of Science between 1921 and 1938 were arrested.

The vast figures of deaths may almost numb the reader to the individual human effects, taken in particular. Many memoirs make it clear, for example, that the wives of the arrested led a fearful life of persecution and penury. Often they could not get news of their husbands' fate. The wife of Titsian Tabidze, the Georgian poet who was arrested and shot in 1937, was not informed of his death for nearly 20 years. Her long calvary is movingly described by Boris Pasternak in his "Letters to Georgian Friends." Much the same story is told of the Russian poet, Pavel Vasiliev. Arrested on February 7, 1937, he was shot on July 16 of the same year; his wife again only learned of his death 20 years later.⁴⁶

Families were, in any case, subject to the hostage principle—which was actually incorporated into Soviet published law in the particular case of escapes abroad. Under the decree of June 9, 1935, even members of the family ignorant of the escapees' plans were liable to penalties. But, in fact, hostages were used widely, especially in the confession trials.

There was, indeed, we are told by a Soviet spokesman of the Khrushchev period,⁴⁷ even a special category for the death penalty under the accusation "wife of an enemy of the people." Children, too, suffered, under a decree of April 7, 1935, which extended the death penalty down to the age of 12. Trotskyite children down to this age were executed in the camps. There were even trials of children alone. When, early in 1939, the Soviet press started to report the arrest of

⁴⁵ Sakharov, *op cit*, p. 52.

⁴⁶ "Literaturnaya Rossiya," December 11, 1964.

⁴⁷ "Pravda," October 31, 1961.

various NKVD officers for extorting false confessions, one case concerned children down to 10 years old. This has since been described in greater detail by the Soviet liberal, Leonid Petrovsky, in his "Letter to the Central Committee," dated March 5, 1969. Four officials from the police and prosecutor's office had rounded up, in all, 160 children mainly between the ages of 12 and 14. After severe interrogation, they had confessed to espionage, terror, treason, and links with the Gestapo. One 10-year-old, after an all night interrogation, broke down and admitted to anti-State activity, going back 3 years, to the time when he was only 7. Petrovsky adds that similar mass trials of children had taken place in a number of other cities.

In fact, with all the horrible and extraordinary accumulation of death it is difficult to estimate, and, of course, impossible to quantify, the moral suffering of the period. But it must be noted that it was not merely a matter of physical torture, death in disgrace and exhaustion, the anguish of broken homes, the constant fear of tomorrow. Boris Pasternak tells us that when the war came, with all its horrors, it was a relief:

It isn't only in comparison with your life as a convict, but compared to everything in the thirties, even to my favorable conditions at the university, in the midst of books and money and comfort; even to me there, the war came as a breath of fresh air, an omen of deliverance, a purifying storm * * * And when the war broke out, its real horrors, its real dangers, its menace of real death, were a blessing compared with the inhuman power of the lie * * *

Having to act out, to pretend enthusiasm for a vast system of vicious falsehood, was a corruption of the heart, and perhaps, as Pasternak implies, the worst thing of all for many. To die, or lose your loved ones, is bad enough. To do so under a false accusation—and virtually all of the accusations were false—is worse. But to be forced to denounce your father or husband, in the hope of saving the rest of the family, and, in general, to be compelled in public to express joy at the whole bloodbath, may be thought worse still. Truth almost perished. As the writer Isaac Babel remarked, "Today a man only talks freely to his wife—at night, with the blankets pulled over his head."⁴⁸ Every man became, in a sense, what Donne says he is not, an island.

THE REGIME CONSOLIDATED—1938-53

This greatest wave of Russian suffering ended with the fall and execution of Yezhov, himself. From 1939 onward, a normal rate of terror, rather than the extremes of the previous 2 years, was maintained. The country and the party had been broken. Over the ensuing period, interrupted but not essentially altered by the war, the terror was simply a normal institution of the established Stalinist state. During this period an influx into the labor camps of about a million new prisoners per annum made up for continuous erosion of the camp population by starvation and execution. In fact, after the war, in the early fifties, the camps seem to have reached their maximum population which, Alexander Solzhenitsyn tells us in "The First Circle," was often exaggerated, being in fact no more than 12 or 15 million—figures approximately the same as those arrived at by the various evidence and deductions available in the West.

⁴⁸ Ilya Ehrenburg, "Men, Years and Life," English ed., London, 1963, vol. 4, p. 195.

The annexation of the Baltic States and the other border areas in Eastern Europe resulted in the imposition on these hitherto un-Sovietised areas of the Stalin penal system. The listings of suspects for Lithuania indicate approximately 23 percent of the population, in all, something in the nature of a million Balts seem to have been deported. From the areas annexed from Poland, in addition to about 200,000 Polish prisoners of war, about 400,000 civilians were sentenced to labor camps. Of these, about 270,000 died over the two and a half year period before they were released under the Polish-Soviet Treaty.

In early 1940, when the Soviet Union was at peace, the Soviet Government ordered the massacre of the Polish prisoners of war held in the camps at Kozielsk, Starobielsk, and Ostachkov. There were about 15,000 of these, including about 8,700 officers, 800 of them doctors. The approximately 5,000 held at Kozielsk were taken into the Katyn Forest in April 1940 and there shot and buried in mass graves. These were discovered when the Germans occupied the area. In spite of a Soviet claim that it was the Germans, themselves, who had shot them, an international medical commission including neutrals, representatives of the Polish underground, and Allied prisoners of war, were all clear that the German story was, for once, true. The evidence may be examined in a number of books, but here it is only necessary to say that the Soviet story fails on a whole series of grounds and is nowhere credited by serious students.

It had long been Soviet practice to deport suspect minority nationalities from border areas. The Koreans of the Maritime Province around Vladivostock were removed to Central Asia in the thirties, as were the Finnish Ingrians of the Leningrad area. In 1941, and in 1943-44, the politburo ordered and organized the deportation of eight national groups, totaling one and a half million people, in the North Caucasus and elsewhere. These included the Crimean Tartars, the Kalmyks, and the Chechens. These nations were sent en bloc, men, women, and children, to various parts of Soviet Asia where they were held in appalling conditions under police control. The death rate ranged from about 25 percent (the Meskhetians) to over 46 percent (the Crimean Tartars)—the best estimate of the total of deaths seems to be just over half a million. We are told by Academician Sakharov that the highest rate of casualties was among children and old people. The alleged autonomous republics and so forth, which had catered for these people, disappeared from the maps and the names removed from the list of admitted entities. They remained in oblivion until the late fifties when five of them were rehabilitated and restored to their homelands. There are still three national groups, totaling about three-fourths million, who, though they have now been cleared of charges of mass treason, are still penalized and not permitted to return to their homelands—the Crimean Tartars, the Volga Germans, and the Meskhetians.

The turn to anti-Semitism in the modern style in the Soviet Union only came in 1943-44, though Zionism and the Jewish religion had been heavily persecuted for decades. Yugoslav Communists, visiting Moscow at that time, were astonished to hear that generals and others had been "exposed" as having Jewish blood. In 1949, when a new wave of arrests swept various Soviet groupings, large numbers of Jewish cultural and public figures were arrested, including almost all the

members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. Over the following years, attacks became increasingly sharp. The Yiddish theaters and periodicals were closed down. The leading Jewish actor and producer, S. Mikhoels, was shot down by NKVD gunmen in Minsk in 1949. In 1952 came the still obscure Crimean affair, in connection with which all Yiddish cultural figures were executed—it is estimated that about 600 of these were shot over this period.

Stalin's new wave of terror, which had included a large-scale killing of Leningrad Communists, culminated in the "Doctors' Plot" of 1952-53, where, once again, Russia's leading physicians were arrested and tortured into confession that they had plotted to poison the Soviet leadership, largely for motives of Jewish bourgeois nationalism. Stalin gave personal instructions to the investigators on how to obtain these confessions: "Beat, beat, and beat again."⁴⁹

AFTER STALIN

After Stalin's death in 1953, a considerable relaxation took place and by 1957 it seems that the camp population had been cut to about a third. Certain of his more rigorous laws—including that on hostages—were repealed and a large rehabilitation of his victims among Communists, soldiers, and writers took place. On the other hand, the laws against opposition to the state remained draconic and the rehabilitations were notably incomplete. For example, none of these executed in the two first Moscow trials has ever been rehabilitated.

These changes mainly took place under the aegis of Nikita Khrushchev. His attempt, if not radically to reform the system, at least to repudiate the horrors of the past, petered out with his fall in 1964. The years since then have seen a progressive rehabilitation of Stalin himself, an increase in the prestige of the Secret Police, and the suppression—once again—of the more unpleasant facts of the Soviet past. Indeed, there has been a progressive worsening of the situation. Nothing resembling the extremes of Stalinism has reemerged. But many of the camp complexes are still flourishing. Estimates of the numbers inside vary from about half a million upwards. And the worst feature of the whole system—the inadequacy of the camp ration—has remained quite unaltered. The death rate is all the same much lower, largely because those receiving this inadequate fare are nevertheless no longer used to any great extent on truly back-breaking labor such as lumbering. One method, not indeed new but becoming more frequent nowadays, is the detention of leading advocates of political reform in lunatic asylums run by the Secret Police, where they can be submitted to various "cures," often of a degrading and painful nature and always without medical justification.

But, while Lenin's and Stalin's terrors destroyed whole social classes, by the 1960's the activity of the ever powerful Secret Police was directed, and needed to be directed, not at the population at random, but only at those who genuinely showed some sort of resentment at or rejection of the system.

⁴⁹ Khrushchev's secret speech to the XXth Party Congress.

WESTERN MISAPPREHENSIONS

History, it has been said, is the propaganda of the victor. One of the difficulties of dealing with Communist history is that all of us, or most of us, have been influenced over a half a century by versions more concerned to present the official Soviet picture than to discover the truth. It is true that in the last 2 decades a formidable body of independent scholarship has investigated these matters; but in spite of its status and influence, it does not seem to have driven out at least the remnants of unfounded assumptions which entered into the Western liberal conscience over the earlier period.

For the true condition of the Soviet Union in these matters was long concealed from many in the West. Part of the concealment, of course, was due to the precautions of the Soviet authorities to ensure as wide a measure of secrecy as possible. But even then, much information became available, through refugees, and others. The Russians, and their supporters throughout the world, simply denied the truth of these allegations. It may seem incredible that a great amount of true, and mutually confirmatory evidence, should be rejected by large numbers of men of good will in America and elsewhere. They seem to have been deceived basically because they had accepted a picture of the world into which the true facts did not fit. Some of them were, in one form or another, "socialists". They had been told that the Soviet Union was a "socialist" state. And at any rate, it clearly was not what they reprobated most, a "capitalist" state. And they were unaware of other possibilities. Under "socialism" they knew—indeed, it followed by definition—that serious injustices could not take place. Even those of them who willingly acquiesced in the execution of any number of "capitalists" or Fascists, could not credit that under socialism people would be falsely and publicly charged with Fascism. Nor was their imagination flexible enough even to consider the notion that a socialist state would, or could, conceal the existence of labor camps full of millions of starving prisoners. The most they could accept was that a very limited number of anti-social types were being redeemed by productive labor in prisons of unexampled humaneness.

However, it must not for a moment be suggested that all socialists took this view. There were many on the left—and even on the extreme left—to whom the facts were perfectly clear, and who refused to pretend otherwise. It was among moderate liberals, heavily penetrated and influenced indeed by men more devoted to the Soviet scheme, that the highest level of self-deception was reached.

THE RELEVANCE OF RUSSIA'S PAST

An excuse often advanced for these Soviet actions is, in effect, that things were as bad, or worse, in the previous Tsarist period. It needs to be strongly emphasized that this is by no means the case. Up to 1905, the Tsarist regime was in the most literal sense an autocracy, and even after that date it was the most backward polity in Europe. Nevertheless it was progressing. And, even more important, it had never produced anything remotely comparable to the terror of the Communist regime.

For example, for the last half century of Tsarism, the only capital crimes were attempts on the life of the Emperor, his wife, and the

heir to the throne, and certain offenses against quarantine laws. In the 1870's special courts were temporarily set up for terrorists. But over the whole period before 1902 the death sentences amounted to no more (for 39 assassinations, including that of Tsar Alexander II) than a few score. A confidential Tsarist document gives 48 executions, while a Soviet source (*Small Soviet Encyclopedia*, 1st ed.) gives 94, from 1866 to 1900.

Increasingly, political assassinations became widespread, causing about 1,400 deaths in 1906 and 3,000 in 1907. Large areas were put under special regulations and courts-martial tried those accused of terrorism and rebellion. These courts only existed for a few months but over a thousand executions resulted. (Soviet sources give 1,139 executions in 1907, and 1,340 in 1908; while they also speak of 6,000 executions in the period 1908-12, and of 11,000 in the period "following the 1905-7 Revolution." The highest figure that can be arrived at from these sources is one of about 14,000.)

The other crime of which Tsarism can be rightly accused, at least in a general sense, was the pogroms against the Jews—that is, members of the Jewish religion—which started in the latter part of the nineteenth century. (Ironically enough, these pogroms were also encouraged by the revolutionaries of that period—not on racial or religious grounds, but as a form of popular terrorism against "exploiters.") Tsarist officialdom, at one level or another, was often involved in the incitement of these bloody riots. The number killed over the whole period may have been over a thousand. Generally speaking, if we set a limit of 25,000 for all executions, pogrom murders and deaths in prison of the period from 1867 to 1917, we will be safe. The total maximum imprisoned (in 1912) was 183,949. It is absurd to compare these figures with those of the Soviet epoch, let alone justify the latter by them. Over the first-half century of Soviet rule, the executions were at least 50 times as numerous as over the last-half century of Tsarist rule, and the maximum number of prisoners at least 70 times as great. Moreover, in every other respect as well, the standards of humanitarianism had enormously worsened. In Tsarist times torture was the rarest and most scandalous exception: and the hostage system quite unknown. Lenin himself, the most intransigent enemy of the Tsarist regime, had suffered exile in a village where he was free to work, received letters, got an allowance, met his friends, hunted and so on. In the later period, any friend of a friend of some maker of a minor joke about the government was locked in a camp and working himself to death on starvation rations, without hope of release.

Naturally this is by no means to deny that the Russian past is relevant. The country had, at any rate since the 13th century, been the scene of cycles of dreadful violence. The true creator of the unified and expansionist Russian state was Ivan the Terrible, who would massacre all the inhabitants of any of his own towns which showed signs of independence, as in Pskov and Novgorod. Ivan, who was openly admired—and rehabilitated—by Stalin, was also the founder of the first terror organization or secret police proper, the Oprichnina. His death was soon followed by the Time of Troubles, in which the armies of pretenders and of foreigners again ravaged the country and the permanent underground criminal element, nowadays known as *blatniye*, with their own laws and customs, sprang up.

The restoration of the State by the Romanovs led to stagnation. No feudal system, properly speaking, arose. That is to say, there was no body of rights and duties linking the people, the privileged and the Crown. Under the Tsars—and particularly after the system became fully stabilized in the 18th century—there was an absence of even theoretical rights: everyone was, in principle, simply the servant of the autocrat. The “modernization” carried out by Peter the Great and Catherine the Great consisted of the rationalization of this system, and the establishment in Russia of the technical, the military and the administrative methods of the West, but nothing of its civic and political content. At the beginning of the 19th century most of the population were “serfs”. (This word is to a great degree misleading. The usual Russian word “rob” means slave. And in fact the serf had in general fewer rights than the slaves of the Americas.)

Russia was thus heavily and deeply brutalized, at the top by the irresponsibilities of absolute power, and at the base by the absence of social responsibilities and rights.

In the 19th century, however, the beginnings of a great change began to show themselves. Western ideas came back with the officers who had defeated Napoleon, Tsar Alexander II emancipated the serfs in 1861, and through the century an educated middle class arose. In the years before the revolution, the beginnings of a genuine civic life had begun to lay down roots—though as yet comparatively shallow ones. Even in the political sphere the autocracy was substantially modified by the concessions made after the 1905 revolution. And an independent peasantry with a true feeling for the land had begun to emerge.

On the other hand, the older revolutionaries, who had accepted Western radical ideas at the end of the previous century, and had come to them without any ballast of political and civic experience, evolved into abstract fanaticisms. When the Bolsheviki Revolution took place in 1917, it meant (from the humanitarian point of view) that a group of men who believed that all not sharing their views were representatives of irremediable evil, and who openly put forward the idea of terror as a political weapon, were in control of a country and state where a whole history of irresponsible and archaic brutality had as yet been only superficially eroded, and lay ready to burst forth. Moreover, over the ensuing years, it was precisely the class in which the civilized virtues had genuinely taken root which was destroyed—not merely by literal means, but also through the emigration of millions of Russians in the wake of the Civil War. (Lenin to some extent saw this; while remarking that the culture of the Russian middle classes was “inconsiderable, wretched”, he said that even so it was “in any case greater than that of our responsible Communists”).

As yet, it is undeniable that all the vast expenditure of human life has not led to the juster or more humane society promised. If anything there has been, in these qualities at least, a retrogression.

SUMMARY

In my book, “The Great Terror,” I sought to estimate the overall cost in human lives of the Stalin-Yezhov terror. The figures were brought together in a paragraph which it might be appropriate to quote at this point:

Taking the conservative figures of an *average* over the period 1936-50 inclusive, of an 8 million population of the camp, add a 10-percent death rate per annum, we get a total casualty figure of 12 million dead. To this we must add a million for the executions of the period, certainly a low estimate. Then there are the casualties of the pre-Yezhov era of Stalin's rule 1930-36. This includes as its main component the 3½ million who perished in the collectivization itself, plus the similar number sent to the camps where virtually all died in the following years: again minimal estimates. Thus we get a figure of 20 million dead, which is almost certainly too low, and might require an increase of 50 percent or so, of the debit balance of the Stalin regime for 23 years.

To obtain the total number of human beings directly killed in the Soviet Union by the Communist authorities since the revolution, we should add to this the casualties of the Lenin period. The number we take as dying as a result of the revolution, though not actually at the hands of its agents, depends on the degree to which we blame the plagues and famines of the early period on the seizure of power by a minority group and the consequent collapse of authority; and how much we blame the 1921 famine on the food policies of "War Communism." But, even leaving them aside, the result is striking enough.

All the same, in concentrating on these figures, it would surely be wrong to forget the vast amount of unquantifiable human misery resulting from, indeed part of, this same process. The suffering of wives whose husbands disappeared, the children who were orphaned, cannot be counted. The spiritual cost of being forced to denounce one's own parents, the mental torment of lying in fear of unjust arrest and death night after night for months or years, are not subject to measurement.

Finally, the sheer scale of all this human suffering, both physical and spiritual, is such that it cannot be regarded as a mere accident or observation. It was, on the contrary, part of the very essence of the attempt to create by force a new political and social order—and one which, based on the exaltation of the totalitarian party as against the rights of the citizen or of the truth, continues to put itself forward on a world scale as the alternative to our own tradition.



A P P E N D I X

CASUALTY FIGURES FOR THE STALIN TERROR*

No exact numbers can yet be given of those who suffered in the Great Purge. In general Soviet citizens speak of "millions of lives" broken, of "millions of innocent people in camps and prisons".¹ The estimates tentatively put forward in chapter 10 are those which for various reasons have seemed reasonable to the author. We can indeed be sure that they are of the right order of magnitude, but the evidence will naturally lack precision until the NKVD archives are available for examination.

Nevertheless, there is much material which bears on the question. And without attempting to deduce from it a rigor which it will not at present support, we can list the main points which lead to the type of conclusion I have come to.

This can suitably be done under five main heads. First, the number arrested can be considered. Second, the number of these condemned to death, or at least executed. Third, the numbers in the labor camps. Fourth, the death rate in those camps. The figures for each of these depend to some degree on the others, but there is in every case a body of evidence directly bearing on the special point. Fifth and additionally, we can consider, looking back from the most recent Soviet census, the population deficit produced by the Purge. I have thought it best to give each train of evidence separately, and not make any explicit attempt to collate them. The extent to which they confirm each other, and the areas of uncertainty too, will be fairly apparent.

A. ARRESTS

1. We know from the Stalin-Molotov Secret Instruction of May 8, 1933² that there were at that time 800,000 persons in "places of detention . . . *not* counting labor camps and colonies," that is, prisons. All accounts agree that crowding was much greater in 1937-38 than at any previous period: we can take 1 million as a minimum, at any rate.

It fits with direct evidence from the cells. The Butyrka held about 30,000 prisoners,³ If we conservatively allow another 20,000 for the other Moscow prisons, plus those of the towns of Moscow province, that would imply a total in the whole country of 950,000: Moscow province, with about 9 million inhabitants, had about one-nineteenth of the total population. Moscow is, indeed, not entirely typical. Its high concentration of party members and Government officials were particularly liable to arrest; on the other hand, ordinary citizens are usually reported to have suffered less than the norm, and in general these factors are believed to balance out. (Leningrad, with a province population of about 6 million, reportedly had some 40,000 prisoners in 1940.)⁴ A figure around a million might still be an underestimate of the number actually held in prisons proper at a given moment in 1937-38.

2. An estimate which has found much support is that the average prisoner, over the whole 2-year period, stayed in jail about 3 to 4 months.⁵ This would give a total arrest figure for the 2 years of 6-8 million, if we accept an average jail population of only a million.

A complementary figure, given by an NKVD interrogator himself under arrest, is that there were 3,000 interrogators in Moscow alone.⁶ If they concluded a case a week on the average—not a heavy demand—this would be at the level, for the whole country, of 6 million for the 2 years of "political" prisoners only.

3. Dr. Alexander Weissberg, the physicist, who was in the Kharkov prisons from March 1937 until February 1939, estimates that about 5.5 percent of the

*Reprinted from "The Great Terror" by Robert Conquest, with the permission of the Macmillan Co.

population of the area feeding these jails were arrested during this period.⁷ Among other indications, a check was kept by following the numbers on the receipts given prisoners for their goods confiscated on arrest—money, braces, etc. But this was confirmed by other methods. (Avtorkhanov, a high official in the North Caucasus, estimates that about 4 percent of the population of that region was arrested in 1937 alone, though he appears to grant that this is a higher figure than for the U.S.S.R. as a whole.)⁸

It has been objected to Dr. Weissberg's figures that Kharkov too may not be representative. But Weissberg in fact compared the local figure with those made by prisoners who had done the same computation in other parts of the country,⁹ and found that 5-5½ percent was regularly reported. (Another prominent academic prisoner who conducted the same researches concluded that 5 percent was a minimum figure for arrests.)⁹

Applied to the population total as given in the 1939 census,[†] this would mean about 8½ million arrests.

4. It can be estimated that during the most crowded period in the winter of 1937, over 4,000 men a week went from the Butyrka prison, mainly into camps, and were replaced.¹⁴ For the whole of Moscow province one might postulate 7,000. If the average over the 2 years was of the lower order of c. 4,000, we get a total for the 2 years of 416,000; which applied to the whole country would give just under 8 million as the total number of arrests.

5. In 1934, at the 17th Party Congress, there were 2,817,000 members and candidate members of the party. Under the then regulations, candidates could not retain that intermediate position for more than 3 years. That is, by the 18th Congress in 1939, they should all have been promoted—or expelled. The full membership in 1939 was 1,568,000, and of these c. 400,000 had not been in the party at all in 1934. That is, there is a deficit of c. 1,640,000. About 300,000 had been expelled in 1934, when comparatively nonincriminating reasons were common. But the rest, including the 1935 expellees,** formed the first and hardest hit target of the whole purge. We can scarcely allow that a quarter of them escaped arrest. This would give a figure for party arrests of not far short of a million.

Another careful estimate¹⁶ is that about 850,000 expulsions took place in the 18 months, January 1937 to June 1938, which accords with the above estimate.

The figure most commonly found of the proportion of non-party to party arrests runs at 7-8 to 1. This would give some 8-9 million arrests.

6. Other estimates are of the same general type. A Yugoslav estimate is that there were about 7 million arrests in 1936-38.¹⁷ An estimate by a responsible party official is also 7 million arrests.¹⁸ In fact all our chains of evidence (treated, in general, somewhat conservatively) lead, though without any real precision, to some such figure.

B. EXECUTIONS

1. Of the number of death sentences the impression of careful observers is that "they did not exceed 10 percent of the whole".¹⁹ An analysis of reports on 471 random arrests in the period 1936-40 (relatives of 2,725 Soviet citizens later defecting to the West) included 52 known death sentences²⁰—around 10-11 percent. On the arrest figures we have, this would give c. 700,000 "legal" executions.

The party official who estimates 7 million arrests suggests that the death sentences amounted to about 500,000.²¹

2. We were told by a Soviet writer that in the Lefortovo, as early as August 1937, they were shooting 70 men a day.²² The rate for the first 5 months of 1937, must have been a good deal lower; but, on the other hand, things were worse over the winter of 1937-38. If we take a total of 40,000 over the 2 years, we shall probably not be far wrong. This would give a figure of around 800,000 for the whole country if all the remaining prisons in it accounted for 20 times as many executions, which seems conservative even allowing for the special circumstances of the Lefortovo.*** Then again, local NKVD branches in the provinces were

*As another prisoner remarks: "Every cell possesses at least one statistician."¹⁰

†One of the difficulties is that we do not know what to make of the 1939 census. The census taken in January 1937 was suppressed, and publicly though vaguely denounced,¹¹ for "gross breaches of the elementary bases of statistical science." The Census Board is believed to have been shot. But what it was that proved unsatisfactory in their results is unknown. An NKVD rumor had it that the total population fell far below what was expected and required (a figure of 147 million instead of the 170 million reported in January 1939 was bruited).¹² On the other hand, the published total seems on the face of it compatible with the known and estimated population trends, and a quite different motive for the stifling of the 1937 figures—unsatisfactory social distribution—has been suggested.¹³ Even so, in the circumstances, we can hardly repose unreserved confidence in any aspect of the 1939 census.

**A typical description of the reasons for expulsion being that they were "kulaks, white guards, Trotskyites, Zinovievites, and all other filth."¹⁴

***E.g. in Gorki, provincial population c. 4m., fifty to seventy executions a day are reported at NKVD headquarters.

ordered on occasion simply to execute a given number of "enemies of the people" in their hands, that is, not prisoners held by GULAG in camps, but by the local authorities in prisons. For example, a former NKVD officer reports one telegram of which he was personally aware, and which is doubtless representative of others sent regularly throughout the Union, such is its air of routine formality: this was from Yezhov to the NKVD chief at Frunze, capital of Kirghizia:

"You are charged with the task of exterminating 10,000 enemies of the people. Report results by signal."

The form of reply was:

"In reply to yours of * * *, the following enemies of the people have been shot," followed by a numbered list.²³ One order to the city NKVD of Sverdlovsk called for 15,000 executions. Another, to a small town near Novosibirsk, ordered 500, but the NKVD there could find only petty offenders available. In the end they had to shoot priests and their relatives, all who had spoken critically of conditions, amnestied former members of White Armies and so on—mostly people who would have ordinarily qualified for 5-year sentences or less.²⁴ One example of this type of massacre has become known in physical detail. Mass graves were discovered in Vinnitsa, in the Ukraine, in 1943, when the area was under German occupation, and were examined—like the Katyn graves—by an international commission of medical experts. The number of corpses, all killed by shots in the back of the neck, except for a few cases of braining with gun butts or clubs, was over 9,000. There were 1,670 corpses examined. These shootings seem to have taken place in 1938. The identifications made by relatives give the latest arrests in June that year. The bodies were buried actually within the city limits in an orchard, a cemetery, and a section of the municipal park. This implies a far greater likelihood of discovery than in the (presumably more natural and usual) selection of more isolated spots. The discovery was, in fact, made because various inhabitants had heard or seen suspicious actions. There is thus a presumption—as indeed can be deduced from Katyn—that other similar massacres remained undiscovered. (But we can also note in the selection of such sites that the NKVD in 1938, is shown as arrogantly sure of itself in its treatment-of the population.)

The population of Vinnitsa before the war was about 70,000, and of the province about 1 million. If these 9,000 were the only executions in Vinnitsa, if they represented the entire province, and if the same proportion applied throughout the country, we get a figure of c. 1½ million executions. The same calculation applied to the (less solidly authenticated) Frunze and Sverdlovsk massacres mentioned above give a countrywide figure of over a million, from these one-shot operations alone.

4. Very significantly to estimates derived from known death sentences, there was also a sentence of forced labor "without right of correspondence." No ex-prisoner ever met anyone serving such a sentence. Moreover, when the mass grave at Vinnitsa was examined, a number of relatives identified corpses whose sentence had been notified to them as of (usually) 10 years "without right of correspondence." We can conclude that this phrase was no more than a method of concealing the execution rate. We have no means of estimating the numbers of deaths thus misrepresented. But the employment of this ruse was pointless unless it had substantial application, and one Moscow informant notes several out of his own limited acquaintance. An ex-NKVD officer says that it was quite a normal procedure.²⁵

4. Mass executions were also ordered at this time in the camps. These were almost always carried out somewhat furtively. Prisoners would disappear to special centers, and thus not be reckoned by their mates among the camp death rate estimates. Genuine old Trotskyists, of whom a few still survived even in 1938, were usually given a formal, if rapid, "trial," but this was exceptional. An account from the central isolation prison of the Baikal-Amur railway group of camps, where executions were entirely clandestine and without sentence, estimates that in the 2 years, 1937-38, some 50,000 people were executed here in this fashion.²⁶ In addition to such operations, death sentences for sabotage and anti-Soviet propaganda were routine in camp.²⁷

5. 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. One officer of the central NKVD estimates about 2 million "liquidations" in 1936, 1937, and 1938.²⁸ An official Yugoslav statement estimated, as we have seen, that the total "killed" in 1936, 1937, and 1938, was 3 million.²⁹ These seem high figures and perhaps include estimated camp deaths other than by shooting.

C. NUMBERS IN THE CAMPS

We are not able to give exact figures in this field any more than in the others. But there are methods of estimating which are sound in principle and cannot give answers that are far wrong, if carefully applied. Though arising independently, they tally with each other. And the results are in adequate accord with those deduced at the other end of the process—the rates of arrest.

1. First, we have a set of figures, authentic in themselves, but needing interpretation, for the forced labor resources expected by the NKVD to be available in 1941. These come in the secret "State Plan for the Development of the National Economy of the USSR in 1941."³⁰ The version available is incomplete. From its list of the amount of production allotted, one can make certain deductions on the amount of forced labor in lumbering, coal-mining, and other spheres. But it omits gold-mining, agriculture, and certain other branches, and, in particular, gives no figures for the out-contracting in construction work done by the NKVD for other Commissariats, one of its major spheres. Professor Swianiewicz, in a careful and conservative estimate based on this, arrives at a total of just under 7 million. It should be noted that late 1940, was a comparatively low period for camp population: Wiles, estimating 8 million for 1939, gives 6½ million for 1940.

2. The second method is also sound in theory—that based on prisoners' reports. Dr. Julius Margolin, for example, was imprisoned in several camps of the Baltic-White Sea group from 1940 on. He found that the group contained a Division 28, that each division had at least 10 to 15 sites, and that these held a range from a few hundred to a few thousand prisoners. A rough deduction gives several hundred thousand prisoners for the whole. (The true total is believed to be about 300,000.) Obviously such individual estimates can give no more than a rough result. But when a considerable number of such reports are collated, plainly a very reasonable approximation can be attained. This was done, over the whole range of camps, by Dallin and Nicolaevsky in the midforties, and their conclusion warrants considerable confidence. (Many of the survivors of the c. 440,000 Poles sent to labor camps in 1939-41, and allowed to leave the U.S.S.R. in 1942-43, gave useful indications.) Calculations so based give a figure, for the 1940-41 period, of 8-12 million.

3. There are various odd points in Soviet statistics published in the late thirties which have seemed to researchers to give indications of a possible labor camp figure. For example, there is a discrepancy between the aggregate payroll for the whole economy and the total wage bill on the basis of official labor statistics, amounting to 18.5 percent of the total payroll. Part of this is accounted for by the Army, but it has been estimated that 13.5 million involuntary workers remain after that has been done. These would include the large category of those doing "forced labor" at the place of employ, then a common penalty though a short-term one.

Again, the author of the most authoritative study of the Soviet population (Lorimer) was puzzled by a residue of 6,790,000 unaccounted for in terms of employment, pensions, Army, etc., plus just under 1¼ million labelled "social group not indicated". Similarly, an analysis applying to the 1939 figures the proportion of population to labor force of the 1926 census—a point not given in that of 1939—left a residue of 10 million.

Thus, those who take these approaches as genuinely significant can deduce from them figures of the right sort of magnitude. But the formal difficulties are great, and in none of these cases is it possible to say that the apparent anomaly is not accountable in some other way.

It is clear again, that the 1939 census does *not* list the prisoners in the areas which actually contained them. Komi, for example, is given as having c. 319,000 population, half of them of the local nationality, and Magadan as a mere 173,000 (these figures are probably adequate to cover the free staff of the camp complexes, and their surroundings). Nor is it possible to establish whether or not the census contains the prisoners in any other way.

We must leave it that neither the census nor any other published Soviet statistics of the period have yet yielded any sound basis for an estimate; though it is worth noting that the expected population for 1937, as given in the preface, prepared in 1936, to *The Second Five Year Plan for the Development of the National Economy of the U.S.S.R.* (English ed., New York, 1937), was 180,700,000, as compared with the census result of 170,467,000 two years later.

4. Other evidence is simply by report, but deserves consideration because it must often represent official leakage or at worst informed guesswork.³¹ The general estimate in the camps themselves over 1938-41 was from 15 million

upward, and this was shared by many NKVD officers themselves under arrest. It was also the common rumor in official circles. GULAG officials arrested in 1938 gave about 10 million as their own estimate. There are a few lower estimates, such as that of an official who gave 6 million "with a strong upward trend" in early 1941. A colonel connected with the inspectorate of camp guards from 1934 to 1941 said there were between 12 and 14 million just before the war.* That these estimates run several million higher than those arrived at by other methods is probably due to the inclusion of those charged under other articles of the Code than 58—that is, "common criminals" such as bandits, small speculators, breakers of labor discipline, et cetera. Most of these did not go through the processes described above but were held at detention centers attached to the police stations (Moscow had 11 prisons in addition to the five named in the Purge literature). There, their cases, involving simple and genuine facts, were processed in 2 or 3 days; and they went straight off to camp.

5. No exact computation being possible, one can see that these figures, together with those for arrests and executions, are compatible with a highly conservative solution of the following type—not including "criminals," as not specifically victims of the purge—for the end of 1938:

In jail or camp already January 1937.....	c. 5 million
Arrested January 1937–December 1938.....	c. 7 million
Total.....	c. 12 million
Of which executed.....	c. 1 million
Died in camp 1937–38.....	c. 2 million
Total.....	c. 3 million
In captivity late 1938.....	c. 9 million
Of which in prison.....	c. 1 million
Total in camps.....	c. 8 million

D. DEATH IN THE CAMPS

We are typically told that "during the first year about one-third of the prisoners die,"³² mainly of exhaustion. That is, those physically most unfitted to the extreme conditions of the camps went quickly. Taken as applying to the newly arrested of 1937–38, it would imply a loss of about 1 million of them each year, over the period immediately following admittance.

This 30 percent death rate for the new intake is not of course the death rate for the camp population as a whole. A careful study of this has produced a rate in camps, in 1933, of about 10 percent per annum. In 1938 it had risen to about 20 percent.³³ This variation is compounded by another difficulty—that our information usually comes from particular areas, and there was much variation in conditions. Kolyma, as we have seen, had a death rate of up to 30 percent. If we take its average population as 500,000, possibly an underestimate, this camp area alone probably accounted for over 2 million deaths up to 1950. Lumber work, and others in the far north—especially on the Vorkuta railway—were also dangerous employments. But in general, leaving aside a few very bad and a few notably moderate camps, the total impression is that the ration was always and everywhere insufficient to the work, and until 1950 always produced a death rate of a minimum of 10 percent per annum.

An estimate in the broad scale, though still not a precise one, can be made in the case of the Polish prisoners of 1939–42. Of 1,060,000 Poles taken to labor camps, or forced settlement, about 270,000 died. Of these, the great majority perished in the labor camps, which accounted for about 440,000 of the total detainees. Even allowing for the executions at Katyn and elsewhere, and starvation in a number of free settlements, it seems that not less than 40–50 percent of the labor-camp inmates of Polish citizenship must have died during an average incarceration of around two to two and a half years.³⁴

Release was very rare. Moreover, in the late forties, as is now admitted those who had been released were all rearrested. Thus, the average prisoner had to go

*After the war there was certainly an increase. NKVD functionaries imprisoned in 1948 spoke of 12 million. The commandant of a "repatriation camp" feeding the labor camps spoke of the post-war total as 15-17 million.

through bad years as well as fair, and except in a few favored camps was most unlikely to survive. Of 3,000 Kursk "collaborationists" sent to camp after the recapture of that city in 1943, only 60 were alive in 1951.³⁵

After 1950 the death rate, at least in the main zones of northern Russia, became little higher (except for "disciplinary" deaths) than the local civilian rate. The physical possibility of surviving a sentence existed, though the prospects at the time seemed poor, for, as the well-adjusted "Ivan Denisovich" could say:

"Maybe you could last 10 years and still come out of it alive, but how the hell could you get through 25?"³⁶

Fortunately, these later victims did not have to wait so long. But the average camp inmate arrested in the period before 1950 had usually been through killing years, as with the men from Kursk. The 1937-38 victims who did not go under in the first wave of deaths often survived right up to the war. But the bad years then ensuing killed the vast majority of them. They are only reported most exceptionally in the post-war evidence.

Taking the conservative figures of an average over the period 1936-50 inclusive of an 8 million population of the camps and a 10 percent death rate per annum, we get a total casualty figure of 12 million dead. To this we must add a million for the executions of the period, certainly a low estimate. Then there are the casualties of the pre-Yezhov era of Stalin's rule, 1930-36—this includes as its main component the 3½ million who perished in the collectivization itself plus the similar number sent to camps where virtually all died in the following years: again, minimal estimates. Thus we get a figure of 20 million dead, which is almost certainly too low and might require an increase of 50 percent or so, as the debit balance of the Stalin regime for 23 years.

ADDENDUM: THE SOVIET CENSUS OF JANUARY 1959

The total figure of 208,827,000 was some 20 million lower than Western observers had expected after making allowance for war losses—even though the first losses of the purge, or such of them as may be registered in the 1939 census, had also been taken into account. On the other hand war losses had probably been underestimated and this remains to some degree an imponderable.

But the main point arises from a consideration of the figures for males and females in the different age groups:

Age (Jan. 15, 1959)	Number (thousands)		Percent	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
0 to 9.....	23, 608	22, 755	50.9	49.1
10 to 19.....	16, 066	15, 742	50.5	49.5
20 to 24.....	10, 056	10, 287	49.4	50.6
25 to 29.....	8, 917	9, 273	49.0	51.0
30 to 34.....	8, 611	10, 388	45.3	54.7
35 to 39.....	4, 528	7, 062	39.1	60.9
40 to 44.....	3, 998	6, 410	38.4	61.6
45 to 49.....	4, 706	7, 558	38.4	61.6
50 to 54.....	4, 010	6, 437	38.4	61.6
55 to 59.....	2, 906	5, 793	33.4	66.6
60 to 69.....	4, 099	7, 637	34.9	65.1
70 and older.....	2, 541	5, 431	31.9	68.1
Age not given.....	4	4		
Total.....	94, 050	114, 777	45.0	55.0

Many women died as a result of the war and the purges. But in both cases the great bulk of the victims was certainly male. From neither cause should there be much distinction in the figures for the sexes for the under-30 age groups in 1959. Nor is there. For the 30-34 block the proportion of 453 men to 547 women is a comparatively small difference, presumably indicating the losses of the young Army men in their late teens during the war. In the 35-39 group, which could have been expected to take the major war losses, we find figures of 391 men to 609 women. One would have thought that these men, in their early twenties in the war, would have had the highest losses.* But the proportion then gets worse still,

*This obvious point is backed by one of the few available age analyses of actual deaths in war. Losses in the German Army in World War I in proportion of age groups were distributed as follows: 15-19, 2.81 percent; 20-24, 15.26 percent; 25-29, 22.9 percent; 30-34, 15.48 percent; 35-39, 11.6 percent; 40-44, 6.38 percent; 45-49, 3.49 percent.³⁷

and for the 40-44, 45-49 and 50-54 remains a set 384 to 616. Even more striking, the worst proportion of all comes for the 55-59 age group (334 to 666: in fact in this group alone there are almost exactly twice as many women as men). The figures for the 60-69 group (349 to 691) and for the 70 and over group (319 to 681) are also much worse than the soldiers' groups.† Now all authorities agree that the Purge struck in the main at people "between 30 and 55"³⁸, "generally, arrested people are all 30 or over. That's the dangerous age: you can remember things."³⁹ There were few young or old, most of them being "in the prime of life."⁴⁰ Add 20 years for the 1959 position.

Precise deductions are not possible. Older men died as soldiers in the war. But on the other hand, the mass dispatch to labor camps of prisoners of war returned from Nazi hands in 1945 must have led to an extra, and nonmilitary, death rate among the younger males. So must the guerrilla fighting in the Baltic States and the Western Ukraine which lasted for years after the war; and so must the deportations from the Caucasus and the general renewal of purge activities in the post-war period. But in any case, the general effect of the figures is clear enough. The wastage of millions of males in the older age groups is too great to be masked, whatever saving assumptions we may make. We here have, frozen into the census figures, a striking indication of the magnitude of the losses inflicted in the purge.

† It is true that losses in the First World War and the Civil War have some effect on this group, but in the census of 1926 there is none with a deficit of males of more than 10 percent.

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