

Soviet Repression Statistics: Some Comments

MICHAEL ELLMAN

... a debate is taking place between a historian who in his research bases himself on real documents of the MVD, and those whose estimates are based on the evidence of witnesses and scattered (often unreliable) data. This situation turns the question of the necessity for academic criticism of the data which entered the official departmental statistics of the MVD, Ministry of Justice and Procuracy, into a practical one.

V.P. Popov, 'Gosudarstvennyi terror v sovetskoï Rossii, 1923–1953 gg. (istochniki i ikh interpretatsiya)', *Otechestvennye arkhivy*, 1992, 2, pp. 20–21.

... the official data are clearly better than earlier outside estimates, but are they *complete*? They need critical scrutiny. We do not yet know the answers to many important questions, because the accounting system was chaotic and the figures lent themselves to manipulation. Bureaucratic as well as political motives led to the separate registration of various categories of prisoner ... One has to ... avoid leaping to conclusions. Scholars in this sensitive field need to be humble about the extent of current knowledge but ambitious in setting future goals.

J. Keep, 'Recent writing on Stalin's Gulag: an overview', *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés*, 1997, 2, p. 110.

Judging by the example of Turkmenistan, a task requiring time and labour, undertaken by groups of historians, will be necessary to verify the data [on 1937–38 repression victims] and fill in the gaps. Besides the accounts of the central NKVD apparatus, it is essential to take account of documents from provincial archives which contain the data on the place and concrete activities [which comprised the] repressive operations.

O. Hlevnjuk [Khlevnyuk], 'Les mécanismes de la "Grande Terreur" des années 1937–38 au Turkménistan', *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 39, January–June 1998, p. 205.

Recently a debate took place in this journal about the accuracy and meaning of Soviet repression statistics.¹ The present article discusses five aspects of these statistics: releases from the Gulag, repression deaths in 1937–38, *ubyl'*, the relationship between stocks and flows, and the total number of repression victims.

Releases from the Gulag

In their well known 1993 paper giving a preliminary presentation of archival repression data,² Getty, Rittersporn & Zemskov surprised many readers by their unexpectedly high figures for releases.³ According to this paper, in 1934–52, 5.4 million people were freed from the Gulag. The largest annual figures (about 620,000 in 1941 and 510,000 in 1942) are obviously mainly explained by releases to the armed forces. Getty, Rittersporn & Zemskov state that during the war about 975,000 Gulag inmates were released to military service (in particular to punitive or ‘storm’ units, which suffered the heaviest casualties).⁴ Similarly, the large number (approximately 340,000) of prisoners released in 1945 was a consequence of the July 1945 amnesty. Nevertheless, their data show 370,000 released in 1936, 317,000 in 1940 and about 330,000 in 1952.

Since these large figures for releases are for many people counter-intuitive, it is not surprising that Conquest writes that, ‘as to the numbers “freed”: there is no reason to accept this category simply because the MVD so listed them’.⁵ In this connection it is important to note the following: prisoners can be freed because they complete their sentences, because the sentences are remitted, because of an amnesty or because they are too ill to work and hence are a burden on the camps’ food supply and number of guards and other personnel, and on their report figures for output, productivity, mortality and financial results. Whereas an amnesty (as in 1953) is a sign of humanity, release to die indicates a callous attitude of camp bosses to their prisoners.

In 1930 the OGPU issued order no. 361/164 of 23 October ‘On the unloading from the OGPU camps of the elderly, complete invalids and the very ill’. This provided a procedure for the release of this ‘unfit for work ballast’.⁶ In January 1934 this order was cancelled by OGPU order no. 501.⁷ In November 1934 NKVD order no. 00141 once again provided a procedure for the release of ‘the ill, the elderly and invalids’. Amongst other things it instructed the relevant bodies to draw up a list of illnesses which would qualify the person concerned for release. In June 1939 a decree of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet banned the practice of early release of prisoners.⁸ On 29 April 1942 Beriia and the USSR Procurator Bochkov signed a joint directive banning ‘until the end of the war’ all releases from the camps (e.g. of people who had completed their sentences) with the exception of ‘complete invalids, the unfit for work, the elderly and women with children’, who could be released ‘in the case of complete impossibility of using them in the camps’.⁹

In accordance with a decree of the USSR Supreme Court of 1 August 1942 and the joint directive of the NKVD, Narkomyust and the Procuracy of 23 October 1942 resulting from it, prisoners suffering from incurable diseases were to be released from their places of detention. In accordance with a list of incurable conditions, approved by the head of the Gulag, people were to be freed if they suffered from ‘emaciation as a result of avitaminosis’ (this was a bureaucratic expression for starvation), ‘alimentary dystrophy’ (this was another bureaucratic expression for starvation), leukaemia, malignant anaemia, decompressed tuberculosis of the lungs, open bacillary tuberculosis of the lungs, acute amphysemna of the lungs etc. As Isupov sensibly notes, ‘In other words, the prisoners were released to die’.¹⁰ Conquest quotes two cases of people being released when they were on the point of death and correctly

points out that this shows that the categories used in Gulag statistics may be misleading.¹¹ He seems to be unaware, however, that the release of prisoners on the point of death was official policy and practised on a currently unknown scale over many years.

The Gulag had two functions, punitive and economic. To implement the latter, its inmates had to provide large amounts of hard physical labour. Prisoners who could not do that and could not do any other kind of work were for many of its officials just an unwanted burden which worsened its economic success indicators.¹² The policy of releasing ‘unfit for work ballast’ was a cost-cutting measure which was intended to save on food consumption and on guards and other personnel, and hence reduce the deficit and improve productivity in the Gulag. It increased ‘efficiency’ (i.e. the ratio of output to inputs) while simultaneously improving the financial results and the mortality statistics. (Similarly, after the war, German POWs who were invalids or very ill were released before the able-bodied. From an economic point of view this was entirely rational and optimised the results of utilising the POWs.) Wheatcroft correctly drew attention to the fact that senior officials were concerned about high mortality and that ‘incidents of high mortality were often investigated’.¹³ This, however, did not necessarily lead to an improvement in conditions, since camp bosses could improve their mortality statistics by releasing those about to die. In fact, the bosses of the Gulag as a whole were keen to improve the mortality statistics this way. An instruction of 2 April 1943 by the head of the Gulag forbade including deaths of released former prisoners in Gulag mortality statistics.¹⁴ (This is not the only example of the use of mortality data as success indicators leading to misleading mortality statistics. The postwar filtration statistics, which purport to show that as of 1 March 1946, out of the 4.2 million people checked, 58% had been sent home, include those who died in the filtration camps among those ‘sent home’.¹⁵)

The release of ‘unfit for work ballast’ continued after the war. According to Volkogonov, quoting archival sources, ‘In July 1946 Beriya reported to Stalin that the MVD’s corrective labour camps during the war had “accumulated” more than 100,000 prisoners who were completely unfit for work and whose upkeep required substantial resources. The MVD recommended that the incurably ill, including the mentally disturbed, be released. Stalin agreed ...’.¹⁶

At the present time there do not appear to be any data available on the number of those who died within, say, 6 months of being freed from the Gulag.¹⁷ Nevertheless, two things are already clear. First, the large number of people recorded as being ‘freed’ are not necessarily a sign of the humaneness of the system but may simply reflect—at least in part—its callous attitude to its prisoners. Second, the official Gulag statistics on mortality *in the camps* understate mortality *caused by the camps*, since they exclude deaths taking place shortly after release but which resulted from conditions in the Gulag.¹⁸

Repression deaths in 1937–38

There are two types of contemporary official documents from which one can derive figures on repression deaths in 1937–38. They are the NKVD records and the demographic statistics (the censuses of 1926, 1937 and 1939 and the population

registration data). The former have been presented and discussed by Wheatcroft in this journal,¹⁹ the latter were discussed by Wheatcroft & Davies.²⁰ In addition there are a wide variety of estimates not based on contemporary official documents but based on personal, first-hand, unofficial, so-called literary sources.

Isupov, relying on the NKVD data, came to the conclusion that repression deaths in 1937–38 were ‘about a million’.²¹ This figure was based on the NKVD official figures of 682,000 shot in 1937–38 following sentence on NKVD cases (*po delam organov NKVD*)²² + 116,000 who died in the Gulag²³ + non-article 58 arrestees who were shot²⁴ + an allowance for possible underestimation.²⁵ If one relies entirely on the NKVD data, then about a million seems to be a reasonable estimate, and possibly even an overestimate. For example, simply adding all those who died in detention to those officially recorded as being shot may result in some double counting, since it seems that in some cases people who died during interrogation were registered as having been condemned by a troika.²⁶ However, although the NKVD data are very useful, they suffer from three limitations. First, the categories used may be misleading, as in the case of those recorded as ‘freed’, which was discussed above.²⁷ Second, the NKVD data on killings are known to exclude some categories of victims. Wheatcroft has explained that the NKVD data for 1939–41 exclude the Katyn massacre, other killings of the population of the newly annexed areas, especially the Poles, and the mass shooting of soldiers (deserters and so-called deserters) in 1941.²⁸ Third, there are apparent or real contradictions in the NKVD data. For example, Ivanova has drawn attention to apparent significant discrepancies in the data on the number of people sentenced by the *Osoboe soveshchanie* in 1940–52.²⁹ The data given for this category in the much cited 1953 Pavlov report (‘Kruglov figures’)³⁰ appear to be contradicted by other data. In such cases it is necessary to examine the data carefully to see whether the discrepancies are merely apparent (e.g. resulting from definitional differences) or real. If they are real, it is necessary to assess the relative value of the different sources. These three limitations are common ground amongst all the participants in the debate. They suggest that an estimate which takes literally the currently available NKVD data may be too low.

In view of these limitations, it seems inappropriate to treat the NKVD statistics as a point estimate and more appropriate to treat them as a range. The lower bound of this range would be formed by taking the NKVD data and categories literally. In that case the number of excess deaths would be 682,000 (the number of those reported as shot on NKVD cases) + 150,000 registered deaths in detention (the SANO/URO average—see note 23) + 2,000 excess non-article 58 shootings, which equals 834,000. Since there is reason to think that the Pavlov report excludes some NKVD killings (‘executions’), that the data for registered deaths in detention understate actual deaths in detention, and that some of those released in 1937–38 died in 1937–38 as a result of their treatment in the Gulag (see above), then a reasonable minimum estimate is 950,000. The upper bound of the range would be formed by estimating the actual number of NKVD killings at, say, 850,000, the actual number of deaths in detention in 1937–38 at, say, 200,000, the actual number of excess non-article 58 deaths at, say, 5,000 and treating all those recorded as released from the Gulag in 1937–38 (644,000) as having died by 31 December 1938 as a result of their treatment in the Gulag. This produces an upper bound of 1,699,000.³¹ This figure, however, is much too high,

since the assumption that all those released in 1937–38 were dead by 31 December 1938 is most implausible. In April 1937 Ezhov told Molotov that more than 60,000 prisoners a month were being released from camps and other places of detention and requested the organisation of a programme to reintegrate released prisoners into the labour force.³² This implies that in the first half of 1937 large numbers of able-bodied prisoners were being released. Similarly, of the 54,000 prisoners recorded as having been released from the Gulag in the first quarter of 1940, 66.5% were released because their sentence had expired and only 0.006% (three persons) on the grounds of illness.³³ If one assumes that three-quarters of those recorded as released in 1937–38 were still alive on 31 December 1938, then that would reduce the upper bound to 1,216,000 or, rounded to the nearest 50,000, 1.2 million.

The above means that in view of the uncertainties about their accuracy and the meaning of the categories they use, it is too early to argue for a precise figure for repression deaths in 1937–38 on the basis of the currently available NKVD accounting data. Rather, they can be used to support a range. It was argued above that the most convincing estimate of this range, given current knowledge, is 950,000–1.2 million. This range includes the Isupov estimate. It also includes the Rosefielde estimate (1.075 million).³⁴ The two main areas of uncertainty are NKVD killings ('executions'), excluded from the Pavlov report, and the mortality experience of the 644,000 people recorded as being released from the Gulag in 1937–38. Further research on these two topics would be most valuable.

In 1994 Wheatcroft & Davies, using both the demographic and NKVD data, suggested that repression deaths in 1937–38 were 'about 1–1½ million'.³⁵ The range was wide because of uncertainty about the accuracy of the NKVD statistics and the difficulty of allocating victims among the various demographic disasters of the 1930s. These include the famine of 1931–34, excess deaths among repressed peasants and deportees, and the repression of 1937–38. The Wheatcroft–Davies estimate overlaps with that suggested above on the basis of a consideration of the NKVD data alone, but its upper bound is above that which a consideration of the NKVD data alone would suggest. Since 1994 we have learned more about the NKVD data, their meaning and limitations. It now seems more sensible to rely on the corrected NKVD data. This reduces the upper bound of the Wheatcroft–Davies estimate by 300,000.

Conquest, on the other hand, suggests that repression deaths in 1937–38 were 2–3 million, i.e. more than double the above estimate based on NKVD records and double the Wheatcroft–Davies estimate.³⁶ Conquest's estimate raises three issues: the method used in deriving it, its compatibility with the demographic data and the sources on which it is based.

Method

Conquest's method is the utilisation of a wide variety of personal, first-hand, unofficial, so-called literary sources. Before *glasnost*' this was the only source available. As Wheatcroft has repeatedly acknowledged, its use enabled Conquest to generate estimates of NKVD killings ('executions') in 1937–38 much more accurately than the sceptics thought. They were also more accurate than the estimates of some Western academics. However, as a result first of *glasnost*' and then of the collapse of

the USSR, we now have much better sources, the new demographic and NKVD data. The unofficial sources are now just one of three possible sources for studying repression, alongside the demographic and NKVD data. The unofficial sources can be of great value for providing a qualitative picture of what happened and for conveying the subjective impressions of those involved. However, when comparing the value of these three sources, it is important to realise that the use of the unofficial sources *for generating numerical estimates* suffers from a major weakness. It is well known that the unofficial sources are frequently very unreliable as sources of quantitative data. An example of this is Antonov-Ovseenko's underestimate of the USSR's 1937 population.³⁷ Antonov-Ovseenko fell into the trap of using a (downward) approximation of the *normally enumerated* population as an estimate of the *total* population (which also included those enumerated by the NKVD and NKO and those not enumerated at all). Furthermore, the use of unofficial sources introduces an important bias into our study of Soviet repression and penal policy, in favour of political and against criminals. Although only a minority of the inhabitants of the Gulag were officially classified as 'counterrevolutionaries' (although, as is agreed by all the participants in this debate, the division between criminals and politicals was blurred under Soviet conditions³⁸), the unofficial or literary sources mainly derive directly or indirectly from the politicals and hence give a one-sided picture. In these sources criminals figure mainly as a hostile and dangerous element, rather than as, say, themselves victims of rapid and violent social change. A former NKVD official has observed of Solzhenitsyn's writings that they give 'the impression that the prisoners of the Gulag were mainly political prisoners. This is not so. The overwhelming majority of prisoners were criminals. Otherwise the Gulag would not have been able to fulfil its tasks. With the hands of intellectuals, which is what the political prisoners were, it would have been impossible to carry out the immense works, in the course of which a mass of heavy manual labour was undertaken'.³⁹ In only 2 years, 1946 and 1947, did the 'counterrevolutionaries' form a majority of Gulag inmates.⁴⁰ If more use had been made of the experience of the criminals (e.g. by means of oral history) our image of the Gulag would be substantially different.

However, it is important to note that the categories used in the Gulag statistics to classify the inmates by type of offence were 'highly misleading'.⁴¹ Hence the statistical division between 'politicals' and 'criminals' is somewhat arbitrary. For example, according to the Gulag statistics for 1 January 1939, the proportion of prisoners for 'counterrevolutionary' offences was only 34.4%. However, the same statistics also classify 21.7% of the prisoners as 'socially harmful elements and socially dangerous elements'.⁴² It seems likely that this group consisted mainly of criminals and marginals (vagabonds, homeless, street children, unemployed, beggars etc.). Their classification is problematic. Was someone who killed an OGPU officer or urban Communist come to deport his family a 'murderer' or a person acting in 'self-defence' against barbarians? Was a homeless person who lived by theft a 'criminal' or a 'victim of political persecution' by inhumane authorities who had deported his parents or taxed out of existence the shop from which his family had earned their livelihood? Similarly, was someone shot as a 'counterrevolutionary' because some malicious person coveted their living space really a victim of *political* persecution? These difficulties in classification reflect the fact that the categories

'criminal' and 'political' are much more appropriate in a settled society than in the violent and revolutionary upheaval which took place in the USSR in the 1930s.

It should be pointed out, however, that Conquest's method has one important advantage. It instils a healthy scepticism as to the *meaning* of the categories in the documents from the NKVD archives and the *completeness* of the figures in these documents. The relevance of the first type of scepticism was shown above. The relevance of the second is shown in the section on stocks and flows below.

Compatibility with the demographic data

On the basis of the demographic data for the 1930s it seems that there were about 10 million excess deaths in 1926–39.⁴³ The total number of excess deaths suggested by Conquest is higher. He suggests a total of perhaps 16–18 million.⁴⁴ This is above what seems likely on the basis of the demographic data. It can only be made compatible with the demographic data by assuming high birth rates between the 1926 and 1937 censuses of babies who soon died and by reducing the 1939 census totals. The birth rate in the early 1930s is uncertain and controversial.⁴⁵ By assuming a sufficiently high birth rate in the early 1930s and adjusting down the 1939 census totals, one can reconcile the Conquest figures with the demographic data.⁴⁶ Some adjustment to the contemporary population registration data for births and to the originally published totals for the 1939 census are generally agreed to be necessary. However, the adjustments required to reconcile Conquest's totals with the censuses are regarded as too large and implausible by most specialists. It should be noted, however, that Conquest reduced some of his numerical estimates in the light of the new data.

Sources

Furthermore, the sources Conquest gives for his estimate are not very impressive. For example, he cites an estimate of 20 million arrests and 7 million deaths in 1935–41 given by Sergo Mikoyan, the son of A.I. Mikoyan, in a Soviet newspaper article.⁴⁷ However, the published version of A.I. Mikoyan's memoirs, edited by Sergo Mikoyan, presents a somewhat different picture.⁴⁸ Neither in the USSR nor elsewhere are newspapers reliable statistical sources.

It is important to note that criticism of Conquest's numerical estimates is not a criticism of the qualitative picture painted by Conquest. As Conquest correctly noted, '... historical work that uses figures that may have to be corrected in the light of later evidence may be sound in every other respect, as is true of the work of historians from Herodotus and Tacitus (impossible figures on Xerxes's and Calgacus's forces, reliable and conscientious as to fact)'.⁴⁹ Conquest is not a specialist in demography or penology whose main aim was to generate accurate statistics. He is a writer on Soviet affairs for the general public. His main aim was to give a qualitative picture of enormous horrors to the general public, and in this he succeeded admirably.

In the present state of knowledge the range derived from the NKVD data of 950,000–1,200,000 seems to be the range which takes maximum account of the available data. It is a range rather than a point estimate precisely because of the limitations of the currently available data. Naturally, as Wheatcroft has repeatedly

stressed, and is in principle the same for all historical data, it is a provisional estimate which may have to be revised as new data come to light.

The number of *excess deaths* in 1937–38 is, of course, considerably less than the number of *repression victims* in 1937–38. It excludes those arrested and still alive in places of detention on 31 December 1938. It also excludes those deported in 1937–38. These were mainly the Soviet Koreans, usually estimated as 172,000 persons, deported in September–October 1937—the first Soviet people to be deported as a whole.⁵⁰ It also excludes army officers, party officials and state officials who were dismissed from their posts in 1937–38 but not arrested. It also excludes the emotional and material suffering of those close relatives of the repressed who themselves were not arrested or deported (but frequently discriminated against—often for many years). In Russia in the 1990s there existed a legal category of *postradavshii* which consisted of people such as children of repression victims, who were not themselves incarcerated but ‘suffered’ as a result of the repression of their close relatives such as parent/s.⁵¹

Ubyl'

In March 1947 USSR Minister of Internal Affairs Kruglov sent a report to Beriia in which he explained his labour requirements for the second quarter. Amongst other things he stated that he would need 100,000 people ‘to cover losses’ (*‘na pokrytie ubyli’*). This passage was quoted by Volkogonov in his Trotsky biography, published in 1992.⁵² In a footnote Volkogonov explained that ‘“*Pokrytie ubyli*” ... means the delivery of fresh workers to replace those who had died in the camps of the innumerable Dal’strois, Spetsstrois etc’’. Conquest concluded from this that in the first quarter of 1947 100,000 prisoners had died in the camps. He used this to illustrate the inadequacies of the MVD data and to criticise their use by Wheatcroft. According to Conquest, Volkogonov had shown that the MVD data on releases were a falsification.⁵³

Was the Volkogonov interpretation in fact correct? Volkogonov enjoyed substantial access both to archives and to persons involved in Stalinist repression and his writings contain a mass of valuable information, much of it previously unknown. His work added substantially to knowledge. Furthermore, he presented his new data to a wide public. This was important both from an educational and from a political point of view. However, he was very sensitive to the changing political climate. When he published his Trotsky biography, the political demand was for high figures for Stalinist repression. Furthermore, study of Soviet demographic statistics for the post-war period shows that *ubyli'*, which literally means ‘diminution’ or ‘decrease’ and is frequently used for military losses, was *not* a synonym for deaths (just as for an army ‘losses’—which include injured and those taken prisoner by the enemy—are not a synonym for deaths). In Soviet demographic statistics of the post-war period *ubyli'* includes not just deaths but also other facts leading to a population decline, such as the call-up of conscripts, moving elsewhere for work or education, or reclassification of rural areas as urban. This can be clearly seen, for example, in the February 1948 report of the deputy representative of the USSR Gosplan to the Secretary of the Moldovan CC reporting the results of his calculation of the size of

the rural population of Moldova after the famine of 1946–47 and explaining the reasons for its decline in 1947.⁵⁴

As far as the Gulag is concerned, by now numerous works have been published presenting contemporary Gulag statistics.⁵⁵ These all show that *ubyl'*, although it includes deaths, is not used as a synonym for deaths and includes other categories leading to a decline in the number of prisoners. For example, a top secret (*sovershenno sekretno*) 1956 report on the numbers imprisoned in the Gulag and colonies in 1953–55 stated that in 1953 *ubyl'* was 1.6 million, of whom 1.2 million were amnestied and released under the amnesty of 27 march 1953.⁵⁶

Hence it is obvious that Volkogonov's explanation of *ubyl'* was mistaken. This means that one of Conquest's arguments for criticising the NKVD–MVD statistics, and the use made of them by Wheatcroft, is erroneous.

Stocks and flows

In a series of articles Wheatcroft has criticised Conquest's estimates of the number of detainees in various years. He has used the recently available NKVD data to argue that they are both incompatible with Conquest's earlier estimates and more reliable than them. Both of these arguments are correct.⁵⁷ The same points were made in Getty, Rittersporn & Zemskov's 1993 *American Historical Review* article. It seems to be widely thought that this shows that earlier 'high' estimates of the scale of the terror were exaggerated.⁵⁸ This is true if one looks only at data on the *stock* of prisoners at any one time. However, the new data also provide information about the *flow* of victims through the repression system. The unexpected finding about the high rate of releases automatically means that the total number of people in the system at one time or another was much higher, relative to the stock of prisoners at any one time, than previously thought. The newly available numbers on the flow are truly enormous. Moreover, as Conquest sensibly noted, they are of a similar order of magnitude to older 'high' estimates of the total number sentenced in the Stalinist era.⁵⁹

According to Zemskov the number of people deported in 1930–53 (first peasant victims of collectivisation and then victims of ethnic cleansing) was 'not less than six million'.⁶⁰ Of this total, 1.8 million 'kulaks' were deported in 1930–31, 1.0 million peasants and ethnic minorities were deported in 1932–39,⁶¹ and about 3.5 million people (mainly ethnic minorities) in 1940–52.⁶² This makes a total of 6.3 million in 1930–52. Rounded to the nearest million this makes six million, of whom the majority were victims of ethnic cleansing. According to the Pavlov report, the number of people *sentenced* for political offences in 1921–53—more precisely on cases of the Cheka-OGPU-(GUGB)NKVD in 1921–38 and for 'counterrevolutionary' offences for 1939–53—was approximately 4,000,000. The number *arrested* in these same categories in 1921–53 according to the Pavlov report was about 6,000,000. Luneev for his 1997 book examined the data on repression in the Central Archive of the FSB and came to the conclusion that the number charged with political crimes in 1918–58 was about 7,000,000 and the number sentenced about 5,000,000.⁶³ According to A.N. Yakovlev, speaking in November 1999 and placing his remarks in an openly political context, a recently unearthed document stated that the number *arrested* for political crimes in 1921–53 was actually approximately 8,000,000.⁶⁴ Kudryavtsev & Trusov

re-examined the Luneev figures and suggested that it was appropriate to include groups excluded from the Luneev figures, e.g. those repressed by SMERSH in 1941–45. Hence they reached a figure for those sentenced for political offences in 1918–58 of 6.1 million.⁶⁵ These additions to the Pavlov/Kruglov figures by Luneev, Yakovlev and Kudryavtsev & Trusov suggest that Conquest and Keep were right to be sceptical about their completeness. However, it is unlikely that the substantial deduction which Kudryavtsev & Trusov make for ‘justifiably condemned’ (see the next section) will find favour with Conquest.

Of those deported or arrested for political reasons from 1921 onwards, the number of deaths about which we have more or less reliable information seems to have been about 3–3.5 million, of which about 1 million were shootings,⁶⁶ 1–1.5 million deaths of deportees (see note 60) and perhaps 1 million deaths of prisoners.⁶⁷ In addition there is the currently unknown number of those who died shortly after being released from the Gulag.⁶⁸ (Moreover, there is also the currently unknown number killed by the Bolsheviks in 1918–20.) As absolute figures for the number of citizens of a country killed or caused to die by its own government, these figures are very large. They greatly exceed, for example, the number of German citizens killed by the Nazis (if one excludes German soldiers killed in wars started by the Nazis and German civilians killed by enemy action in wars started by the Nazis).⁶⁹ On the other hand, relative to the total number of Soviet deaths in 1930–53 they were more modest. If the total number of deaths in the above mentioned categories was, say, 4 million,⁷⁰ that would be only about 3.7% of total USSR deaths in 1930–53.⁷¹ Writing about the role of Gulag deaths in total Soviet mortality, Kokurin & Morukov correctly say that, ‘Contrary to widespread opinion, the share of deaths in detention rarely exceeded 2–3% of total deaths in the country and did not have a major influence on the demographic situation as a whole’.⁷²

This latter conclusion may strike some as strange and counter-intuitive. This reflects a general problem in historical interpretation—attention to extreme cases may distort understanding. As Gregory has noted, with special reference to the impact of the famine of 1891–92 on the image of Russian agricultural development before 1905, ‘single observations do not permit the evaluation of long-term tendencies. Remarkable or catastrophic events (for example a famine) create a stronger impression than everyday phenomena. The influence of catastrophic events is so strong that it eclipses the long-run trends, which are an average of periodic catastrophes and normal years. In the same way that people after the coldest winter of the century think that there is a general tendency to cooler winters, so historians are inclined to generalise on the basis of unique or catastrophic events’.⁷³

The number of people in the Gulag (camps and colonies) for shorter or longer periods just in 1941–53 was about 16 million.⁷⁴ The number in the Gulag for shorter or lesser periods in 1934–40 was about 4,250,000.⁷⁵ Allowing for the 1.5 million stock of prisoners at the end of 1940, this might seem to mean that 18.75 million prisoners flowed through the Gulag in 1934–53. Actually, the situation is more complex. Since some people were sentenced more than once, this figure contains an upward bias (it actually measures sentences rather than individuals). On the other hand, as a measure of total Gulag inmates, it also contains downward biases. It takes no account of the numbers in the Gulag prior to 1934 or after 1953.⁷⁶ It also excludes

some groups classified separately from the other prisoners but who were in the Gulag (or administratively subordinate to it) at certain periods. These included for example the so-called 'special contingent', 'labour army' and 'special settlers'. (The 'labour army' of Soviet Germans in 1942–45 comprised more than 400,000 people.) It also excludes those sentenced to forced labour at their normal place of work (for example under the notorious decree on labour discipline of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of 26 June 1940) even though they were under the direction of the Bureau of corrective labour (Byuro ispravitel'nykh rabot or BIR) which was administratively subordinate to the Gulag. It also takes no account of those repatriated after the war to filtration camps (unless they were subsequently sent to the Gulag). These extraordinary numbers show the enormous scale of political repression and forced labour by criminals in the Stalin period. They are also *higher* than the (rightly criticised) old high estimates of the *stock* of prisoners at various periods.

'Victims of Stalinism'/'Soviet power'

Many writers want to give a single figure for the 'victims of Stalinism' or 'victims of Soviet power'⁷⁷ and are surprised to find such confusion in the literature. Apart from inaccurate estimates of particular categories, an important part of the explanation is simply disagreement about which categories of deaths in the Stalin period should be labelled as 'victims of Stalinism'. Most of the excess deaths in the Stalin period were victims of the three Stalin-era famines or of World War II (these two categories overlap since the second Stalin-era famine was during World War II). Whether these last two categories should be considered to be as much 'victims of Stalinism' as repression victims is a matter of judgement and heavily coloured by political opinion.

Wheatcroft has argued that when thinking about excess deaths in the Stalin era one should make a distinction between murder and manslaughter.⁷⁸ Those who were shot by the NKVD were killed by a deliberate decision of the state. Those who died during or after deportation died because the state failed to make adequate provision for them. Both groups, in the opinion of the present author, belong to the category of 'repression victims'. This also seems to be the opinion of Wheatcroft, who groups 'about a million' purposive killings with 'about two million' victims among the repressed whose death resulted from 'criminal neglect and irresponsibility'.⁷⁹ In view of the scale of the deaths and the development of international law, one can nowadays classify these excess deaths as crimes against humanity (Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, article 7), although this concept was only introduced into international law after World War II and the permanent court to try charges of them was only established decades after the acts concerned came to an end.

More difficult to classify are famine victims. They are considered in the appendix.

It should be noted that the categories 'war victims' and 'repression victims' also overlap since approximately 1 million prisoners died during the war and there were also political arrests and shootings during it. As for the wider category of 'victims of Soviet power', that also includes the victims of the demographic catastrophe of 1918–23.⁸⁰ Who—if anyone—is to blame for that catastrophe is also a matter of political and historical judgement. In addition, whether or not it is appropriate to reduce the total of those unjustifiably sentenced for political offences

on the grounds that some of the sentences were ‘justifiable’ is also a matter of judgement. Kudryavtsev & Trusov, for example, consider that many people sentenced in and after 1941–45 for collaboration and treason really were guilty of those offences. Similarly, they argue that many of the armed opponents of Soviet power in the western Ukraine and the Baltic republics were also justifiably condemned. (Armed resistance to the state by separatists is regarded as an offence—often known as ‘terrorism’—which should be punished, throughout the world, not just in the USSR under Stalin.) Accordingly, they reduce their estimate of 6.1 million condemned for political reasons by 1.4 million ‘justifiably condemned’ (this figure also includes officers of the organs who themselves became victims of persecution under Ezhov, Beriia and Khrushchev) to arrive at a figure of 4.7 million ‘unjustly condemned’ for political reasons.⁸¹ Similarly, to what extent it is appropriate to offset ‘excess lives’ (resulting from falling mortality rates) against ‘excess deaths’ is also a matter of judgement.

As Wheatcroft has repeatedly—quite rightly—stressed, our current quantitative knowledge of repression is provisional and imperfect. A Russian book on political justice in the USSR published in 2000, whose authors were able to use the already existing literature and also had extensive archival access, including to the Central Archive of the FSB, concluded, with special reference to the numbers sentenced to death, ‘we do not yet have precise figures for the number of citizens killed in 1917–53 by order of a court or by extra-judicial organs for “political crimes” or for belonging to a particular social or national group’.⁸²

Since ‘victims of Stalinism’ or ‘victims of Soviet power’ are poorly defined and controversial categories, differing estimates would be inevitable even if we had perfect statistics. Since the currently available statistics are imperfect, the wide range of estimates for these categories is unavoidable. In this situation the best that academic analysis can do is to try to generate the most accurate data possible on the various sub-totals and explain the nature of the different categories and the differing ways in which they can be evaluated. It is to be hoped that via textbooks the best available data will in due course enter general consciousness and that the inaccurate and misleading figures frequently presented will gradually fade away.

Conclusions

- (1) The surprisingly high figures for those freed from the Gulag are partly explained by several decisions to increase the ‘efficiency’ of the Gulag by releasing invalids and the incurably ill. This was a cost-cutting measure which saved food and guards and other personnel, and improved the financial results, but was not a sign of the humanity of the system, and artificially reduced the recorded number of deaths in the Gulag.
- (2) The best estimate that can currently be made of the number of repression deaths in 1937–38 is the range 950,000–1.2 million, i.e. about a million. This is the estimate which should be used by historians, teachers and journalists concerned with twentieth century Russian—and world—history. Naturally it may, or may not, have to be revised in the future as more evidence becomes available. Most of these repression deaths were deliberate NKVD killings (‘executions’) but a

significant number were deaths in detention (some of which were also deliberate). An unknown number of them were people who died shortly after their release from the Gulag as a result of their treatment in it. The higher estimates given by Conquest use a flawed method, can only be reconciled with the demographic data by making implausible assumptions, and rely on unimpressive sources. Conquest's method is, however, useful in generating a healthy scepticism about the meaning of the categories in the NKVD archival documents and the completeness of the figures in these documents. The main uncertainties remaining concern NKVD killings excluded from the Pavlov report and the mortality experience of the 644,000 people recorded as being released from the Gulag in 1937–38. On these two topics further research is needed.

- (3) This estimate of roughly a million is, of course, an underestimate of repression victims in 1937–38. It excludes those arrested in 1937–38 and who were still under investigation on 31 December 1938 or who were sent to places of detention (prison, colony or camp) and survived beyond 31 December 1938. It also excludes those deported (mainly almost 200,000 Soviet Koreans). It also excludes those who suffered but were not 'repressed'. These include those dismissed from their jobs but not arrested, and close relatives of those arrested who themselves were not arrested but did suffer family grief and often material losses and also were frequently discriminated against.
- (4) The March 1947 report by the Minister of Internal Affairs does *not* demonstrate that the recorded Gulag mortality data were falsified. This misinterpretation rests on a misunderstanding of the meaning of *ubyl'* in Soviet statistics of that period.
- (5) It is true that the newly available data show that some earlier estimates of the *stock* of prisoners at various dates were grossly exaggerated. They also show, however, that the *flow* of victims through the repressive system (both deportees and prison, camp and colony inmates) was enormous.
- (6) Estimates of the total number of Soviet repression victims depend both on accurate estimates of the numbers in particular sub-categories and on judgement of which sub-categories should be included in the category 'repression victims'. The former is a matter of statistics on which we are better informed today than previously but on which the figures are still surrounded by a significant margin of uncertainty. The latter is a matter of theoretical, political and historical judgement. The number of deportees (first peasant victims of collectivisation and then mainly the victims of ethnic cleansing) seems to have been about 6 million. Currently available information suggests that the number of those sentenced on political charges was also about 6 million. If these two categories are defined as the 'victims of repression' then the number of the latter was about 12 million. (Of these, from 1921 onwards about 3–3.5 million seem to have died from shooting, while in detention, or while being deported or in deportation. In addition, a currently unknown number died shortly after being released from the Gulag as a result of their treatment in it. Furthermore, a currently unknown number were killed by the Bolsheviks in 1918–20.) This total of about 12 million (of whom at least 3–3.5 million were fatal) can be reduced by, say, 1.4 million by subtracting the number of those 'justifiably punished for political offences'. It can also be increased substantially by including those peasants who were deported 'only'

within their own region and by the about 1 million Kazakhs who fled from Kazakhstan in 1931–33. It can also be increased by including the large number who ‘suffered’ but were not themselves arrested. It can also be increased by including the non-Soviet victims, e.g. the German civilians interned in Soviet death camps at the end of World War II. It can in addition be very substantially increased by including also the victims of war, famine and disease, but whether and to what extent this is appropriate is a matter of judgement. It seems that in the 27 years of the Gulag’s existence (1930–56) the number of people who were sentenced to detention in prisons, colonies and camps was 17–18 million. This figure excludes the deportees, prisoners of war and internees, those in the post-war filtration camps, and those who performed forced labour at their normal place of work, and counts people sentenced more than once just once. The number of prisoners in the Gulag (camps and colonies) in 1934–53 was 18.75 million (a figure which exaggerates the number of people involved since some people were detained more than once). These huge figures are not a measure of political repression. A large number of inmates of the Gulag were criminals. However, the distinction between criminals and politicals was blurred under Soviet conditions, the statistics on the classification of the prisoners are misleading, and the concepts themselves are problematic under the conditions of the 1930s. Some (e.g. the homeless) are difficult to classify either as criminals or politicals. The large number of Gulag inmates is mainly an indication of the large number of people dealt with by the criminal justice system in this period and the harshness of that system.

- (7) During the Soviet period the main causes of excess deaths (which were mainly in 1918–23, 1931–34 and 1941–45) were not repression but war, famine and disease.⁸³ The decline in mortality rates during the Soviet period led to a large number of excess lives.
- (8) There is a substantial difference between the demographic reality of Soviet power and the popular image of it. This is mainly because released intellectual victims of repression wrote books, the organs were bureaucratic organisations which produced reports and kept records, and Ukrainians have a large diaspora, whereas Central Asian nomad or Russian peasant victims of disease, starvation or deportation, criminal or marginal victims of incarceration in the Gulag, the victims of ethnic cleansing, the long-term improvement in Russian/Soviet anthropometric indicators (height and weight)⁸⁴ and the extra lives resulting from falling mortality rates generally interest only a few specialists.⁸⁵ Repression was enormously important politically and was a series of ghastly crimes. It was both mass murder and mass manslaughter. Under current international law it constituted a series of crimes against humanity. It also affected a large part of the population. In absolute numbers of victims, it was one of the worst episodes in the long and cruel history of political persecution. However, repression *mortality* (excluding famine, war and disease mortality, and repression survivors) was only a modest part of the demographic history of the USSR.
- (9) We now know much more about the number of victims of political persecution in the USSR than we did before the archives were opened to historians. We do not yet have, however, precise and complete figures for the total number of

victims or for some sub-totals. Further archival research—and discussion of the meaning and significance of its findings—is still needed.

University of Amsterdam

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¹ S. Wheatcroft, 'The Scale and Nature of German and Soviet Repression and Mass Killings, 1930–45', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 48, 8, December 1996; R. Conquest, 'Victims of Stalin: A Comment', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 49, 7, November 1997; S. Wheatcroft, 'Victims of Stalinism and the Soviet Secret Police: The Comparability and Reliability of the Archival Data—Not the Last Word', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 51, 2, March 1999; J. Keep, 'Wheatcroft and Stalin's Victims: Comments', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 51, 6, September 1999; R. Conquest, 'Comment on Wheatcroft', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 51, 8, December 1999; S. Wheatcroft, 'The Scale and Nature of Stalinist Repression and its Demographic Significance: On Comments by Keep and Conquest', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 52, 6, September 2000.

² J.A. Getty, G.T. Rittersporn & V.N. Zemskov, 'Victims of the Soviet Penal System in the Pre-war Years: A First Approach on the Basis of Archival Evidence', *American Historical Review*, 98, 4, October 1993.

³ One reason for this surprise is the widespread image of Gulag prisoners as being mainly intellectuals sentenced on political grounds. It is indeed true that article 58ers were frequently not released during Stalin's lifetime, even if their original sentence had expired. However, a large proportion of the Gulag's prisoners were ordinary Soviet citizens sentenced for non-political crimes (as defined by Soviet law) and often released on expiry of their sentences or in an amnesty (as in 1953) or for other reasons. The fact that the Gulag prisoners were *not* mainly intellectuals can easily be seen from the data on their cultural and educational level. On 1 January 1940 8.4% of them were illiterate and 30.3% were semi-literate (*malogramotnye*), 49.6% had only a primary education and only 1.8% had a higher education. See V.N. Zemskov, 'Zaklyuchennyye v 1930-e gody: sotsial'no-demograficheskie problemy', *Otechestvennaya istoriya*, 1997, 4, p. 68.

⁴ For more detailed and somewhat different figures on wartime releases to the armed forces see A.I. Kokurin & N.V. Petrov (eds), *GULAG: Glavnoe upravlenie lagerei. 1918–1960* (Moscow, 2000), p. 428.

⁵ Conquest, 'Victims of Stalin ...', p. 1317.

⁶ This phrase comes from OGPU order no. 143 of 17 September 1933. See A. Kokurin & N. Petrov, 'GULAG: struktura i kadry', *Svobodnaya mysl'*—XXI, 1999, 8, p. 122.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 127. The text of the 1930 order has not been available.

⁸ A. Kokurin & N. Petrov, 'GULAG: struktura i kadry', *Svobodnaya mysl'*—XXI, 2000, 3, pp. 119–120. This decree is also printed in Kokurin & Petrov (eds), *GULAG: Glavnoe ...*, p. 116. It seems to have been mainly aimed at the practice of early release for good work.

⁹ A. Kokurin & N. Petrov, 'GULAG: struktura i kadry', *Svobodnaya mysl'*—XXI, 2000, 6, p. 123.

¹⁰ V.A. Isupov, *Demograficheskie katastrofy i krizisy v Rossii v pervoi polovine XX veka* (Novosibirsk, 2000) p. 164. The present author has checked the archival reference given by Isupov and can confirm that Isupov's statements are supported by the archival document cited. A.S. Narinsky, *Vospominaniya glavnogo bukhgaltera* (St. Petersburg, 1997), p. 241, relates the following story. In 1942 a woman received a message from a Siberian camp that her father had been released and that she should come and collect him. Long-distance travelling in wartime was complicated and time-consuming. When, after 2 months, she finally reached the camp, her 'released' father was dead.

¹¹ Conquest, 'Comment ...', p. 1482.

¹² For example, in March 1940, in a report on the activities of the Gulag, its deputy director stated that 73,000 of its inmates were sick and unfit for work and that 'the expenses associated with their maintenance (more than 100 million rubles p.a.) are a heavy burden on the Gulag's budget'. See *Ekonomika GULAGA i ee rol' v razvitií strany v 1930-e gody* (Moscow, 1998), p. 128. (In 1940 100 million rubles was only 1.3% of the Gulag's planned expenditure, but was 20% of its planned deficit. See *ibid.*, pp. 153–154.)

¹³ Wheatcroft, 'The Scale and Nature ...', p. 1151.

¹⁴ Isupov, *Demograficheskie katastrofy ...*, p. 164.

¹⁵ *Naselenie Rossii v XX veke, tom 2 1940–1959 gg* (Moscow, 2001), pp. 154–155.

¹⁶ D. Volkogonov, *Triumf i tragediya*, 2nd ed (Moscow, 1990), vol. 1, p. 410.

¹⁷ Even some of those who died more than 6 months after release basically died as a result of their treatment in the Gulag. For example the engineer Zheleznyak was released as a result of illness/fragility in the summer of 1943 but did not actually die for almost 2 years. See S. Zhuravlev, ‘*Malen’kie lyudi i ‘bol’shaya istoriya’. Inostrantsy moskovskogo Elektrozavoda v sovetskom obshchestve 1920-kh–1930-kh gg* (Moscow, 2000), p. 334.

¹⁸ Conquest, ‘Comment ...’, p. 1481, observed that ‘even when a Gulag document is right as to totals, its categories may be wrong or misleading’. The phenomenon discussed in the text (‘freeing’ people to die) is an example of the categories used in Gulag documents being ‘misleading’.

¹⁹ Wheatcroft, ‘The Scale and Nature ...’; and Wheatcroft, ‘Victims of Stalinism ...’.

²⁰ S. Wheatcroft & R. Davies, ‘Population’, in R.W. Davies, M. Harrison & S. Wheatcroft (eds), *The Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union, 1913–1945* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 67–77.

²¹ Isupov, *Demograficheskie katastrofy ...*, p. 118.

²² Strictly speaking, in 1937–38 the ordinary police (*militsiya*) were part of the NKVD so that *po delam NKVD* if taken literally should include ‘ordinary’ arrests. However, since we know that in 1937–38 a total of 3.1 million people were arrested (*Naselenie Rossiya ... tom 1*, p.318) it seems that the figures in the Pavlov report only refer to cases of the GUGB (Glavnoe Upravlenie Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti) of the NKVD and its local administrations. (See P. Hagenloh, ‘“Chekist in Essence, Chekist in Spirit”: Regular and Political Police in the 1930s’, *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 42, 2–4, April–December 2001.)

²³ In 1937–38 there were 140,000–160,000 registered deaths in the Gulag (camps, colonies and prisons). The reason why there are two different mortality figures is that there were two different agencies that compiled these figures, the medical department (SANO) and the accounting and allocation department (URO). The former figure is the SANO figure, the latter the URO one; see A. Kokurin & Yu. Morukov, ‘GULAG: struktura i kadry’, *Svobodnaya mysl*—XXI, 2000, 10, p. 114. Isupov’s 116,000 figure is the URO figure for the camps alone (excluding the colonies and Gulag prisons where URO recorded another 44,000 deaths in 1937–38). Wheatcroft, ‘The Scale and Nature ...’, suggests that the number of *registered* deaths in detention should be treated as a minimum estimate of the number of *actual* deaths in detention. For a maximum estimate of the number of actual deaths in detention he suggests adding to the figures for registered deaths also the figures for disappearance in transit plus all uncaptured runaways. This produces a maximum estimate of deaths in detention in the Gulag (excluding the colonies and prisons) in 1937–38 of 165,000. (This latter figure is not given explicitly but can be derived by applying his maximum death rates per thousand to the figures he gives for the numbers present on 1 January 1937 and 1938.)

²⁴ Whereas most writers are interested in the total number of victims of *political* excess deaths, Isupov is interested in *total* excess deaths. The difference is accounted for by excess deaths among criminals. Naturally, one could argue, as is done by Conquest, ‘Comment ...’, p. 1481, that many of those classified as criminals in the USSR were ‘really’ victims of political repression. The same point was made by Wheatcroft, ‘The Scale and Nature ...’, p. 1335. Wheatcroft (‘The Scale and Nature ...’, note 35) also quotes a literary source (Solzhenitsyn) which states that in 1937–38, in addition to the shooting of politicals, 480,000 criminals were shot. In his later ‘Victims ...’, p. 327, quoting archival sources, he gives the figure for officially recorded criminal executions in 1937–38 of 5,000. If the number of recorded criminal executions in 1939–40 (3,000—see *ibid.*, p. 337) is taken as the ‘normal’ level, then the number of recorded excess criminal executions in 1937–38 was only 2,000. It seems, however, that a considerable number of those shot *po delam organov NKVD* were *not* politicals but were ‘really’ criminals. For example, V.N. Khaustov, ‘Deyatel’nost’ organov gosudarstvenno i bezopasnosti NKVD SSSR (1934–1941 gg)’, dissertation, Moscow, 1997, pp. 482–483, states on the basis of archival documents that in 1937 157,694 people were arrested by the NKVD (he probably means by the GUGB NKVD) for ‘non-political’ offences and in 1938 45,183.

²⁵ As far as unrecorded executions are concerned, the only hard evidence currently available seems to be Khlevnyuk’s analysis of Turkmenistan, commented on by Wheatcroft, ‘Victims of Stalinism ...’, p. 329. This suggests that the actual number of executions there was about 25% more than that authorised by the centre and hence that the official NKVD figures for the USSR as a whole could be ‘lower than reality’ (O. Hlevnjuk, ‘Les mécanismes de la “Grande Terreur” des années 1937–1938 au Turkménistan’, *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 39, January–June 1998, p. 205).

²⁶ M. Jansen & N. Petrov, *Stalin’s Loyal Executioner: People’s Commissar Nikolai Ezhov, 1895–1940* (Stanford, California, 2002), pp. 104, 135.

²⁷ According to the NKVD data presented by Getty, Rittersporn & Zemskov, ‘Victims of the Soviet Penal System ...’, p. 1048, in 1937–38 the Gulag freed 644,000 prisoners.

²⁸ Wheatcroft, 'The Scale and Nature ...', pp. 1344–1345; Wheatcroft, 'Victims of Stalinism ...', p. 328. R.W. Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era* (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 169–170, also drew attention to the fact that it is not known whether or not the mass shootings of 'several tens of thousands of deserters' in the early stages of the Soviet–German war, for which Beriia claimed the credit in his letter of 1 July 1953 to Malenkov, are included in the Pavlov figures.

²⁹ G.M. Ivanova, 'GULAG yazykom dokumentov', *Novaya i noveishaya istoriya*, 2001, 4, p.153. See also G.M. Ivanova, *Gulag v sisteme totalitarnogo gosudarstva* (Moscow, 1997), p.34. Ivanova notes (*Ibid.*, pp. 34–35) that one possible reason for this discrepancy is that after the split into two *narkomaty* in 1943 there was an *Osoboe soveshchaniye* attached to the NKGB and another one attached to the NKVD. There is another possible explanation (personal communication from G. Rittersporn). The figures given in the Pavlov report for 1939–52 refer only to article 58ers. Those sentenced to death under other articles (for example West Ukrainian or Baltic guerillas sentenced for 'banditry'—article 59–3) are excluded. Hence a discrepancy between the figures in the Pavlov report for those shot by order of the *Osoboe soveshchaniye* and the total number of people actually shot by order of the *Osoboe soveshchaniye* is to be expected. This suggests that what we have here is a merely apparent discrepancy. Ivanova's discussion of it may just reflect her inadequate knowledge of the meaning of the sources.

³⁰ The Pavlov report was published in Kokurin & Petrov (eds), *GULAG: Glavnoe ...*, pp. 431–434.

³¹ There are also two other categories of repression deaths in 1937–38; excess deaths among the 'special settlers' (mainly deported peasants) and excess suicides. The former does not seem to be demographically significant. In 1937–38 recorded actual deaths among the 'special settlers' were only 33,000 (*Naselenie Rossii ... tom 1*, p.280) and recorded excess deaths (compared to deaths among age/gender comparable cohorts among the general population) were still fewer. Excess suicides certainly existed, but seem unlikely to have been demographically significant.

³² P. Hagenloh, '“Socially Harmful Elements” and the Great Terror', in S. Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Stalinism: New Directions* (London, 2000), p.300; Zemskov, 'Zaklyuchennyye v 1930-e gody ...', p.66.

³³ Zemskov, 'Zaklyuchennyye v 1930-e gody ...', p. 66.

³⁴ S. Rosefelde, 'Stalinism in Post-Communist Perspective: New Evidence on Killings, Forced Labour and Economic Growth in the 1930s', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 48, 6, 1996, pp. 974–975.

³⁵ Wheatcroft & Davies, 'Population', p. 77.

³⁶ R. Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (New York, 1990), pp. 485–486; R. Conquest, 'Excess Deaths and Camp Numbers: Some Comments', *Soviet Studies*, 43, 5, 1991, p. 951.

³⁷ M. Ellman, 'On Sources: A Note', *Soviet Studies*, 44, 5, 1992. For another mistake in quantitative estimation by Antonov-Ovseenko, this time resulting from a misinterpretation of archival data (confusing monthly average with annual figures and hence producing estimates 12 times too high), see Ivanova, 'GULAG yazykom ...', p. 152.

³⁸ See for example J. Keep, 'Recent Writing on Stalin's Gulag: An Overview', *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés*, 1997, 2, pp. 100–101. The example which Keep gives, however, is problematic. He writes that 'Some of those not indicted under Article 58 committed offences that were indirectly the result of the regime's repressive policies and would not normally be considered criminal, as when peasant women stole stalks of grain from the collective fields to feed their starving children' (italics added and one footnote omitted). Keep is of course right that many 'criminal' offences were an indirect result of the regime's policies. But theft is normally considered a crime, regardless of the economic position of the thief's family. The victims of the ferocious anti-poaching laws and anti-poaching devices (e.g. mantraps) in early nineteenth century England were at the time officially considered to be criminals even if their children were hungry. Later writers and penal reformers normally considered them to be victims of an unfair system of criminal justice rather than of political repression. (Only under the Old Testament 'law of the corner' would the peasant women in the above example not be considered criminals.)

³⁹ Narinsky, *Vospominaniya glavnogo ...*, p. 217.

⁴⁰ See the appendix to Getty, Rittersporn & Zemskov, 'Victims ...', or the table in V. Kudryavtsev & A. Trusov, *Politicheskaya yustitsiya v SSSR* (Moscow, 2000), p. 305. The main text of the former does not draw the reader's attention to this exceptional 2-year period, although it does very sensibly stress the blurred line under Soviet conditions between 'political' and 'criminal' offences.

⁴¹ G. Rittersporn, 'Zynismus, Selbsttäuschung und unmögliches Kalkül: Strafpolitik und Lagerbevölkerung in der UdSSR', in D. Dahlmann & G. Hirschfeld (eds), *Lager, Zwangsarbeit, Vertreibung und Deportation* (Essen, 1999), p.305.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 306; Kokurin & Petrov (eds), *GULAG: Glavnoe ...*, pp. 416–418. The latter source

refers to this group as 'IVE i SOE'. It has been suggested to the present author that the first 'I' is a misprint for 'S' (personal communication from G. Rittersporn). In that case the category in full is 'Sotsial'no-vrednyi element i sotsial'no-opasnyi element'. Most of these people seem to have been rowdies, thieves, people with a criminal record or the homeless. Someone who is arrested for being homeless would normally be considered neither a 'criminal' nor a 'political'.

⁴³ Wheatcroft & Davies, 'Population', p. 77. Wheatcroft & Davies point out that if ADK are right about the number of births in 1933 then the number of excess deaths in 1926–39 would be significantly above 10 million. For criticism by Wheatcroft of ADK's 1933 mortality estimates see V. Danilov *et al.* (eds), *Tragediya sovetskoï derevni*, vol.3 (Moscow, 2001), pp. 883–886.

⁴⁴ Conquest, 'Excess Deaths ...', p. 951.

⁴⁵ M. Ellman, 'A Note on the Number of 1933 Famine Victims', *Soviet Studies*, 43, 2, 1991; Ellman, 'On Sources ...'.

⁴⁶ Rosefelde, 'Stalinism in Post-Communist ...', pp. 974–975.

⁴⁷ The source cited is *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 9 August 1989; see Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, p. 544. The present writer has checked this reference, and was unable to find in it an article by, or interview with, Sergo Mikoyan, or any other confirmation of Conquest's assertion.

⁴⁸ A.I. Mikoyan, *TAK BYLO Raznyshleniya o minuvshem* (Moscow, 1999). In a footnote on p. 592 the figures of 'about a million' (not seven million) shot in 1934–41 and of an additional 'more than 18.5 million' repressed are cited. The former of these figures is accurate. The accuracy of the latter mainly depends on which period it refers to. 'More than 18.5 million' is in fact an accurate estimate of the number of prisoners—more precisely sentences to detention—in the Gulag in 1934–53. (It should be noted that these figures are not first-hand accounts by Mikoyan of what he had seen in documents he himself had read, but statements about what he had heard from O. Shatunovskaya, who may have misunderstood the information she received from the KGB or said something that was not a correct description of the data she had been given.)

⁴⁹ Conquest, 'Comment ...', p.1481.

⁵⁰ P. Polyan, *Ne po svoei vole ...* (Moscow, 2001), pp. 90–93; T. Kulbaev & A. Khegai, *Deportatsiya* (Almaty, 2000), pp. 49–75. Also about 2,000 Kurds and about 9,000 Chinese and 'Harbiners' were deported in 1937 and 6,000 Iranian Jews and an unknown number of other Iranians in 1938.

⁵¹ N. Adler, *The Gulag Survivor* (New Brunswick and London, 2002), p. 33.

⁵² D. Volkogonov, *Trotskii*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1992), p. 371.

⁵³ Conquest, 'Victims ...', p.1317. The same point was made in his letter in the *American Historical Review*, 99, 3, June 1994, p.1039.

⁵⁴ *Golod v Moldove (1946–1947), Sbornik dokumentov* (Kishinev, 1993), p. 729. Naturally this report uses weasel words to describe the famine. Instead of deaths from 'famine' or 'starvation' it uses the official euphemism of 'alimentary distrophy'. However, this does not affect the way it uses the term *ubyl'*.

⁵⁵ A.N. Dugin, *Neizvestnyi GULAG: Dokumenty i fakty* (Moscow, 1999); Kokurin & Petrov (eds), *GULAG: Glavnoe ...*; V.N. Zemskov, 'Smertnost' zaklyuchennykh v 1941–1945gg', in *Lyudskie poteri SSSR v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine* (St. Petersburg, 1995), pp. 174–177; V.N. Zemskov, chapters XIII and XIV in *Naselenie Rossii ... tom 1*.

⁵⁶ Kokurin & Petrov (eds), *GULAG: Glavnoe ...*, p. 435.

⁵⁷ Popov has argued that the archival data on Gulag numbers cited by Zemskov and others refer not to the number of prisoners but to the capacity of the Gulag, and that there could be significant discrepancies between the two since the Gulag could be run at under capacity, at capacity, or over capacity. For example, he cites a statement by the head of the Gulag that at the beginning of 1946 the capacity of the Gulag was 1.3 million, but the actual number of inmates 1.5 million (V.P. Popov, 'Gosudarstvennyi terror v sovetskoï Rossii, 1923–1953 gg. (istochniki i ikh interpretatsii)', *Otechestvennye arkhivy*, 1992, 2, p. 22). This argument has been cited by Conquest, 'Victims ...', p. 1317 (the year of the citation should be 1992 not 1993). However, Popov's argument does not seem to be relevant to the data presented by Getty, Rittersporn & Zemskov. They give the population of the Gulag (camps and colonies) at 1 January 1946 as 1,557,121. This is in fact slightly larger than the above-mentioned figure for the number of prisoners at the beginning of 1946 ascribed to the head of the Gulag.

⁵⁸ For example, writing in a CPRF publication, L. Pykhalov concluded from the new stock data that talk about 'tens of millions of Gulag prisoners' was completely wrong. See I. Pykhalov, 'O masshtabakh "Stalinskikh repressii"', *Dialog*, 2001, 10, p. 58.

⁵⁹ *American Historical Review*, 99, 3, June 1994, p.1039 (letter to the editor from R. Conquest).

⁶⁰ V.N. Zemskov, 'Deportatsii naseleniya. Spetsposelentsy i ssyl'nye. Zaklyuchennyye', chapter IX in *Naselenie Rossii ... tom 2* (Moscow, 2001), p. 179. Zemskov's figures are somewhat higher than

those of Polyan, *Ne po ...*, pp. 245–249, according to whom the number deported in 1930–52 (excluding the third category of ‘kulaks’ who were deported ‘only’ within their own region and the Kazakhs who fled to other republics or abroad in 1931–33) was ‘only’ 5.545 million. (For the division of ‘kulaks’ into three categories see the Politburo’s decree of 30 January 1930 in V. Danilov *et al.* (eds), *Tragediya sovetskoi derevni*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 2000), pp.126–134.) Zemskov’s estimate of ‘not less than six million’ also excludes the third category of ‘kulaks’; see V.N. Zemskov, ‘“Kulatskaya ssylka” v 1930-e gody: chislennost’, rasselenie, sostav’, chapter XIII in *Naselenie Rossii ... tom 1* (Moscow, 2000), p. 277. According to Wheatcroft & Davies, ‘Population ...’, p. 68, the number of people in this group was 2–2.5 million. However, according to Polyan, *Ne po ...*, p. 245, in 1930 it was ‘only’ a quarter of a million and in 1932 there was a further relocation of ‘kulaks’ within their region of uncertain dimensions. In R. W. Davies & S. Wheatcroft, *Years of Hunger* (forthcoming), it is argued that ‘a clear understanding of the fate and size of Category III must await regional studies based on local archives’. As for the Kazakhs, Polyan estimates that about 1,000,000 fled Kazakhstan in 1931–33. Of this number he estimates that 400,000 fled permanently to other Soviet republics, 400,000 eventually returned to Kazakhstan, and 200,000 fled abroad. Of the deportees, 490,000 had escaped or died (mainly escaped) by 1 January 1932. In 1932–40, 390,000 were officially recorded as dying as deportees. In addition, there were substantial numbers of deaths during transportation in 1932–33 which are excluded from the Zemskov data for those years since these record what happened to the deportees after they had arrived and been registered, not before. In 1940–52 a further half a million deportees died (Zemskov, ‘Deportatsii naseleniya ...’, p.182). This suggests that among the ‘not less than six million’ deportees, deaths were in the range of 1–1.5 million. The data cited by Zemskov and Polyan also appear to exclude the first category of ‘kulaks’. Of these, 284,000 were arrested in January–September 1930. See L. Viola, *The Role of the OGPU in Dekulakization, Mass Deportations and Special Resettlement in 1930*, The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies, no.1406 (University of Pittsburgh, 2000). The data in the Pavlov report suggest that ‘only’ about 7% of them were shot and that most of them were sent to camps and prisons. How complete was the accounting for first category ‘kulaks’ in the Pavlov report is uncertain.

⁶¹ Polyan, *Ne po ...*, pp. 245–246.

⁶² Zemskov, ‘Deportatsii naseleniya ...’, p. 173.

⁶³ V.V. Luneev, *Prestupnost’ XX veka* (Moscow, 1997), p. 180. Unfortunately Luneev does not give precise archival references, which makes it impossible to check his assertions. Furthermore, the very high estimates for repression in the Stalin era which he quotes from a number of unreliable authors undermine his own credibility as a serious researcher.

⁶⁴ A.N. Yakovlev, ‘Noveishaya istoriya Rossii XX veka v dokumentakh: opyt istoriograficheskogo issledovaniya’, *Vestnik Rossiiskoi akademii nauk*, 2000, 6, p. 505.

⁶⁵ V. Kudryavtsev & A. Trusov, *Politicheskaya yustitsiya v SSSR* (Moscow, 2000), pp. 315–316.

⁶⁶ According to a December 1955 report by the USSR Ministry of Justice, in addition to those shot prior to 1940, in 1940–June 1955 approximately 256,000 people were sentenced by courts to be shot (168,000 of them in 1941–42). How many of them were condemned for political offences is not clear, but it seems likely that the overwhelming majority of these victims were condemned for political or military offences. In addition, in 1940–June 1955 there were shootings by order of the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court and by order of the *Osoboe soveshchanie* of the MGB-MVD which are not included in these figures. See A. Kokurin & Yu. Morukov, ‘GULAG: struktura i kadry’, *Svobodnaya Mysl’-XXI*, 2001, 12, pp. 98–99.

⁶⁷ Estimating accurately the number of those detained for political offences who died in detention is difficult. The number of registered Gulag deaths (camps and colonies) in 1930–56 was 1.6–1.7 million (see note 75) but a substantial proportion of those who died in the Gulag will have been criminals. One can obtain a very crude estimate of the number of politicals among the group officially recorded as dying in the Gulag in the following way. According to one estimate, about a fifth of those sent to the Gulag were ‘counterrevolutionaries’ (see note 76). If their mortality experience was the same as other Gulag prisoners, then the number of ‘counterrevolutionaries’ who died in the Gulag would have been 1/5 of 1.6–1.7 million which is about a third of a million. It seems quite possible, however, that the mortality experience of the politicals was worse than that of the criminals. If one makes the rather arbitrary assumption that it was twice as bad, that would suggest that about two-thirds of a million ‘counterrevolutionaries’ died in the Gulag. It is necessary also to take into account unrecorded Gulag deaths, deaths among those who were not recorded as ‘counter-revolutionaries’ but can reasonably be considered political prisoners, and deaths in prisons (the Kokurin–Morukov mortality data exclude all non-Gulag prison deaths and also Gulag prison deaths for all years except 1935–1938). An example of the former is that, just in 1934–40, about 500,000 prisoners are recorded as escaping from camps and colonies, but less than 300,000 are recorded as recaptured. Part of this more than 200,000 discrepancy were probably deaths (cf. footnote 23). See

also Zemskov, 'Zaklyuchennyye v 1930-e gody ...', p. 65. Taking account of these factors and rounding upwards produces the crude estimate of 'perhaps one million'.

⁶⁸ It might be possible to estimate these by examining the statistics of the numbers of 'unfit for work ballast' released from the camps. Records for this category were probably made at the time, and probably still exist somewhere in the archives.

⁶⁹ On the other hand, the number murdered by Stalin (about a million) was certainly less than the number murdered by the Nazis. Hence it is untrue to write (J. Glover, *HUMANITY. A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (London, 1999), p. 317) that 'The numbers of people murdered by Stalin's tyranny far surpass those killed in the Nazi camps'. The only way to save this assertion is to include Stalin's manslaughter/criminal negligence victims and the Stalin era famine victims with the murder victims. For the reasons given in the text the present author considers this misleading.

⁷⁰ Wheatcroft, 'The Scale and Nature ...', p. 1334, suggests a figure of about three million. The difference is explained by two factors. First, Wheatcroft suggests the number of deaths among prisoners and deportees was 'about two million' whereas the present author suggests 'about two to two and a half million'. Second, Wheatcroft takes no account of Gulag deaths after 'release'.

⁷¹ In 1930–53 there were about 107 million deaths in the USSR. See E.M. Andreev, L.E. Darskii & T.L. Kharkova, *Naselenie Sovetskogo Soyuza 1922–91* (Moscow, 1993), p. 118; M. Ellman & S. Maksudov, 'Soviet Deaths in the Great Patriotic War: A Note', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 46, 4, 1994.

⁷² Kokurin & Morukov, 'Gulag: struktura i kadry', *Svobodnaya mysl' – XXI*, 2000, 10, p. 119.

⁷³ P. Gregori [P. Gregory], 'Ekonomicheskaya istoriya Rossii: chto my o nei znaem i chego ne znaem. Otsenka ekonomista', *Ekonomicheskaya istoriya. Ezhegodnik. 2000* (Moscow, 2001), pp. 10–11.

⁷⁴ This number excludes about six million who are recorded as arriving 'from NKVD/MVD camps'. This category may have included some new prisoners. On the other hand, there may be some double counting as a result of repeated arrest/recidivism.

⁷⁵ This figure is arrived at by summing the number of detainees in Gulag camps on 1 January 1934 and the arrivals in 1934–40 from 'other places of detention'. The data used are published in English in Getty, Rittersporn & Zemskov, 'Victims of the Soviet Penal System ...', pp. 1048–1049, and in Russian in Zemskov, 'Massovye repressii ...', p. 314. The number officially recorded as dying in the camps and colonies in 1930–1956 was 1.61–1.74 million (Kokurin & Morukov, 'GULAG: struktura i kadry', *Svobodnaya mysl' – XXI*, 2000, 10, pp. 114–115). The former figure is the SANO one, the latter the URO one (see note 23). According to Ivanova, *Gulag v sisteme ...*, p. 110, just in the war more than two million people died in the camps and colonies of the Gulag, but she does not present any evidence for this high estimate.

⁷⁶ Kokurin & Morukov estimate that in the 27 years of the existence of the Gulag (1930–1956) the total number of prisoners who flowed through the camps, colonies and prisons was 'about 20 million'. In 1930–56 20.2 million people were condemned to detention, but the number of sentences was greater than the number of actual people sentenced, since some people were sentenced more than once. Accordingly they suggest that the actual number of people sentenced was about 17–18 million. Of these totals they state that only about 4,000,000 (20%) were condemned for 'counterrevolutionary crimes' (this is the Pavlov report figure). See A. Kokurin & Yu. Morukov, 'GULAG: struktura i kadry', *Svobodnaya Mysl'-XXI*, 2001, 12, pp. 100–101.

⁷⁷ The numbers in this section refer to Soviet citizens in the USSR only. They exclude foreign POWs, internees and other detainees in the USSR, and also victims of Soviet repression outside the USSR. Obviously Trotsky, the Spanish leftists repressed in the Spanish civil war, the Mongolians repressed in the 1930s, many of the East Europeans repressed in 1945–53 etc were also victims of Soviet repression, but they are not included in this article. The terrible fate of the approximately 300,000 German civilians interned in Soviet death camps in 1945–46 is described by Wheatcroft in 'German and Soviet Repression ...', pp. 1345–1346. (This description covers only a small part of this group, but it seems quite possible that it was typical for the whole group.)

⁷⁸ Wheatcroft, 'The Scale and Nature ...', p. 1320.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1334.

⁸⁰ Davies, Harrison & Wheatcroft, *The Economic Transformation ...*, pp. 60–64; M. Buttino, 'Study of the Economic Crisis and Depopulation in Turkestan, 1917–1920', *Central Asian Survey*, 9, 4, 1990; M. Buttino, 'Economic Relations Between Russia and Turkestan, 1914–18, or How to Start a Famine', in J. Pallot (ed.), *Transforming Peasants* (Basingstoke, 1998); *Naselenie Rossii ... tom 1*, chapters IV, V and VI.

⁸¹ Kudryavtsev & Trusov, *Politicheskaya yustitsiya ...*, p. 339.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 301.

⁸³ According to Glover, *HUMANITY ...*, p. 237, 'Stalinist deliberate killing was on a scale surpassed only by war'. This is not so. It was also surpassed by famine and disease.

⁸⁴ S. Wheatcroft, 'The Great Leap Upwards', *Slavic Review*, 58, 1, 1999, pp. 27–60.

⁸⁵ It is greatly to the credit of Conquest that he wrote a whole book about ethnic cleansing and also a whole book about the famine of 1931–34, which focussed on the suffering of the peasants and which includes a chapter on the Kazakh experience. The former book rightly drew attention to a series of events which adversely affected a large number of people. The latter book drew the attention of the general reader to an enormous humanitarian disaster and was a major contribution to adult education (although the present author disagrees with the interpretation offered in the book). Solzhenitsyn too has always stressed the scale of the 1931–34 disaster.

⁸⁶ A. de Waal, *Famine Crimes* (London and Bloomington Indiana, 1997).

⁸⁷ O.V. Khlevnyuk *et al.* (eds), *Stalin i Kaganovich. Perepiska, 1931–1936 gg* (Moscow, 2001), p.217.

⁸⁸ Khlevnyuk *et al.* (eds), *Stalin i Kaganovich ...*, p.245.

⁸⁹ Conquest himself simply argues the case for 'criminal responsibility' but does not state for which crime (R. Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow* (London, 1986), p.330).

⁹⁰ This is also the view of A.F. Kulish, *Henotsyd. Holodomor 1932–1933. Prychyny, zhertyvy, zlochyntsi* (Kharkiv, 2001).

⁹¹ R. Rosdolsky, 'Engels and the "Nonhistoric" Peoples: The National Question in the Revolution of 1848', *Critique*, 18–19 *passim*.

⁹² Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, p.329.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.329. Ivnitsky agrees with this. See N.A. Ivnitsky, *Repressivnaya politika sovetskoï vlasti v derevne (1928–1933 gg)* (Moscow, 2000), p.299 (this passage refers specifically to the famine along the Volga).

⁹⁴ Davies *et al.*, *The Economic Transformation ...*, Table 22, p. 290.

⁹⁵ Actually, ethnic cleansing under wartime conditions is not uniquely Stalinist. In the UK in 1940 Germans and Italians (most of whom were anti-fascist political refugees) were interned, and in 1942 in the USA 110,000 Japanese-Americans and Japanese were interned. However, the Soviet and UK/USA cases differ substantially with respect to numbers involved, mortality rates and length of time away from home.

Appendix. Do the famine victims belong in the same category as repression victims?

Some writers include famine victims with repression victims, but others treat them as a separate category. In this connection it should be noted that:

- (1) The categorisation of famine victims is theory-impregnated. This means that it depends on one's theory either of famines in general or of Soviet famines in particular. It seems that in nineteenth century Russia peasants generally considered famines 'the will of God'. Naturally, if one accepts the theory of the divine causation of famines then the question of human responsibility cannot arise. Many writers ascribe a large share of the blame for famines to natural conditions (e.g. droughts). In this case a large share of the explanation for the famine deaths would be an 'act of Nature', even though possibly suitable actions by the authorities might have prevented or reduced famine deaths regardless of the adverse natural conditions. On the other hand, some writers treat famines as conquerable and, when they take place, as the fault of the local political system. Given this theory of the causation of famines, then famines are crimes and the criminals are the dictator/generals/politicians who run the country where the famine occurred.⁸⁶
- (2) Whether famine deaths should be considered murder or manslaughter or something else partly depends on the information available to the leadership at the time. If the leadership was unaware of the actual situation their responsibility would be less than if they were fully informed. For example, although the Ukrainian leadership requested a reduction in grain procurement in the summer of 1932 as a result of the needs of their own people, Stalin was informed by Markevich, the deputy Narkom for agriculture, on 4 July 1932 that the 1932 harvest was average and considerably better than that of 1931.⁸⁷ On 25 July 1932 Stalin, although he fully recognised the need to partially reduce the grain procurement plan of Ukrainian collective farms, thought that for the USSR as a whole the harvest had been 'undoubtedly good'.⁸⁸ However, even if careful study of the information environment surrounding Stalin leads to the conclusion that he was inadequately informed about the true situation, this does not eliminate the possibility of criminal responsibility. That depends on the extent to which the inadequate information was itself a result of his policies, in particular the extensive repression which could have made the provision of accurate information very dangerous for the person or organisation providing it. Similarly, the absence of accurate media reports of the situation, which might have forced the government to

take appropriate famine relief measures, was a direct result of the Soviet policy of use of the media as propaganda instruments.

- (3) For a charge of (mass) murder or a crime against humanity (as opposed to manslaughter or criminal negligence) the question of intent is very important. While there is plenty of evidence to justify a charge of manslaughter or criminal negligence, there seems to the present author to be little evidence for murder.⁸⁹ Conquest thinks that Stalin wanted large numbers of Ukrainians to die in 1933.⁹⁰ This seems to the present author possible but unproven and no explanation of the deaths of Kazakhs and Russians. Of course, the general attitude of Marx and Engels and of Russian Marxists to the Ukrainian cause was unsympathetic and during the Civil War many Bolsheviks considered Ukrainian a 'counter-revolutionary' language.⁹¹ In addition, it is well known that in 1932–33 Stalin thought he was engaged in a war against wreckers, saboteurs and sit-down strikers. In a war one strives to bend to one's will, and if necessary kill, one's enemies. Many people were deliberately shot or deported. Nevertheless, evidence that Stalin consciously decided to kill millions of people is lacking. It seems to the present author more likely that Stalin simply did not care about mass deaths and was more interested in the balance of payments (which required grain exports) and the industrialisation programme. Just as the British government in 1943 was more interested in the war effort than in saving the life of Bengalis, so the Soviet government in 1931–33 was more interested in industrialisation than in saving the life of peasants or nomads.
- (4) We are interested in uniquely Stalinist evil, not in events which have their parallels in many countries and thus cannot be considered uniquely Stalinist. Unfortunately, famines in which millions of people die are not unique to the USSR in the Stalin era. Not only was there one in Soviet Russia (in 1921–22) prior to Stalin's accession to supreme power, but major famines were widespread throughout the world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for example in the British empire (India and Ireland), China, Russia and elsewhere. Furthermore, the world-wide death of millions of people in recent decades which could have been prevented by simple public health measures or cured by application of modern medicine, but was not, might be considered by some as mass manslaughter—or mass death by criminal negligence—by the leaders of the G8 (who could have prevented these deaths but did not do so). The present author is sympathetic to the idea that the leaders of the British Empire in the past (India and Ireland) and of the G8 in recent years are guilty of mass manslaughter or mass deaths from criminal negligence because of their not taking obvious measures to reduce mass deaths. However, if they are not condemned for this, it is not clear why—except on a very doubtful historical account of Stalin's knowledge and intentions in 1932–33—Stalin should be convicted for the famine deaths of 1931–34 or of the other Stalin-era famines. Conquest has argued that the 'only conceivable defence' for Stalin and his associates is that they did not know about the famine.⁹² This ignores another possible defence—that their behaviour was no worse than that of many rulers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
- (5) Conquest argues that 'the cause of the famine was the setting of highly excessive grain requisition targets by Stalin and his associates'.⁹³ But it seems the grain procurements in the agricultural year 1932–33 (the main famine year) were *less* than in every other agricultural year in the period 1930–31 to 1939–40 inclusive.⁹⁴ This suggests that something other than procurements, namely the size of the harvest, was also an important factor. Although the low harvests of 1931 and 1932 were partly a result of the political and agronomic policies of the Stalinist leadership, they were partly a result of adverse natural conditions (weather). Hence the exclusive blame which Conquest attaches to procurement policy is one-sided and ignores the size of the harvest.

Accordingly the present author considers it appropriate to place the famine victims in a different category from the repression victims, even if one judges Stalin during the famines to have been guilty of causing mass deaths by manslaughter or criminal negligence. Both categories contain huge numbers of victims, but only the latter was unusual by international standards. About 12 million people were arrested or deported, and at least 3 million died, as a result of political persecution by their own government.⁹⁵

This distinction between famines and political persecution corresponds to normal historical practice. The victims of the 1943 Bengal famine are usually considered to be 'famine victims' rather than 'repression victims' even though by appropriate actions the British Government could have saved many of the lives of those who died. Similarly with the Irish famine of the 1840s. It also corresponds to current international law. Unintentional famine, unlike murder or deportation, is not classified as a crime against humanity (see article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court).