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# MORE LIGHT ON THE SCALE OF REPRESSION AND EXCESS MORTALITY IN THE SOVIET UNION IN THE 1930s

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THE ACADEMIC DEBATE concerning the scale of repression and excess mortality in the USSR during the 1930s has been raging inconclusively for decades. The spread of *glasnost'* in the USSR has so far done little to dampen the attitudes of the rival contenders in this debate in the West. Both Robert Conquest and myself have repeatedly claimed that the new evidence appearing in the Soviet Union has supported our conflicting claims. Conquest is clearly impressed with the bulk of literary evidence, which does indeed tend to agree with his conclusions; much in fact is based upon his own work. My attitude has always been to try to evaluate the nature of the available evidence, to check its origins and the method of argumentation; in these terms the evidence that has been appearing in the Soviet press has been very mixed.[2]

Although there is a role for literary and propagandist works to force a process of rethinking upon closed minds, there is also a need for serious historical work to produce an unemotional and accurate portrayal of reality. So far we have seen relatively few serious historical works on this subject. Such work will require more than literary creativity; it will need a professional, objective evaluation of evidence which until recently has not been available for examination.

In recent months especially there have been tremendous breakthroughs in the availability of archival material in the Soviet Union, and this new material casts considerably more light on several important aspects of Soviet demography in this period.

## *New evidence on the 1937 census and intercensal population movements*

The demographer Mark Tolts revealed in late 1987 that results of the 1937 census had indicated a population of 162 million.[3] This flatly contradicted the claims of Rosefielde and Yuri Antonov-Ovseenko that the 1937 census had indicated that the population in the USSR was only 156 million[4] and that an additional 6 million deaths needed to be added to estimates of excess mortality. Subsequently Vsevolod Vasilievich Tsaplin, the Director of the Central State Archive of the National Economy of the USSR (TsGANKh SSSR), has revealed more information about the 1937 census, intercensal population movements and contemporary evaluations of them.[5] Tsaplin reported that the NKVD contingent[6] listed in the 1937 census was 2,653,036,[7] that 5·7 million deaths were recorded in the famine year of 1933 instead of the average number of 2·6 million per year for 1927–31,[8] and that Kurman, the Deputy head of the Department of Population and Health

Statistics in the Central Statistical Department (TsUNKhU), had sent a formal statement ('*dokladnaya zapiska*') to Kraval, the Director of TsUNKhU, on 14 March 1937 arguing, amongst other things, that the mortality recorded in 1933 underestimated reality by 1 million.[9] The content and importance of Tsaplin's article is covered in more detail in Alec Nove's article in this issue of *Soviet Studies*.

*New evidence on the scale of the labour camps and exiles*

Even more recently the historian V. Zemskov has published several series of figures on population movements in the Gulag from 1934 to 1947,[10] the scale of special exiles (*spetsposelentsy*) on 1 January 1953,[11] the scale of the different categories of exiles on 1 January 1953, together with a listing of the charges for which they were sentenced,[12] and the scale of the special NKVD camps for former military prisoners.[13] These materials indicate that the maximum number of prisoners in Soviet labour camps between 1930 and 1947 was 1·5 million in 1941; this figure excludes prisoners in 'corrective labour colonies', prisoners in jail and exiles. There were 352,000 prisoners in corrective labour colonies on 1 March 1940. During this period prisoners in labour camps suffered a peak level of mortality of 230 per thousand in 1942–43 and an average of 70 per thousand for 1934–47.[14] Concerning other categories of repression Zemskov's data refer primarily to their size on 1 January 1953. There were over 2·75 million *spetsposelentsy* recorded on 1 January 1953, of whom 1·2 million were Germans, just under half a million North Caucasian tribesmen, over 200,000 with Crimean nationalities, almost 140,000 Balts, and just 24,686 former kulaks.[15] The number of exiles recorded for 1 January 1953 was apparently 65,332, of whom 52,549 were male and 12,783 female.[16]

Another recent article, by military historian Major General V. Nekrasov, has reported, from what appears to be a similar official MVD source, that there were 2·3 million prisoners at the beginning of the war, that during 1941–44 another 2·55 million people were made prisoners, that 3·4 million prisoners left, and that 1·45 million remained as prisoners on 21 December 1944.[17] These figures are much larger than those given by Zemskov and appear to include prisoners in jail and in labour colonies, as well as in the labour camps.

Nekrasov also reported that there were 2,526,402 prisoners in March 1953, before 1,181,264 were amnestied by Beria following Stalin's death.[18] From the text it is unclear exactly what categories of prisoners are being referred to, but it appears to refer to all categories, i.e., prisoners in the labour camps, in the corrective labour colonies and in jail.

Combining the figure of 2·53 million prisoners which we presume refers to the camps, colonies and jail, with the 2·75 million *spetsposelentsy* and the 65,332 people in different forms of exile or banishment, the total in these categories is 5·35 million. These figures are, of course considerably smaller than those cited by Conquest and Rosefielde for the Gulag population alone.[19]

*New evidence on the scale and nature of famine mortality*

On my recent visit to the Soviet Union in October 1989 I was given access to the TsUNKhU files on the natural movement of population in the 1930s and to the 1939 census in the Central State Archive of the National Economy of the USSR. The following notes, tables and graphs report on the remarkable material that I was able to find, which casts considerably more light on the nature, scale and effect of the 1932/33 famine.

*1. The scale of the demographic crisis of 1932/33 in relation to natural population movements 1926–40*

*(a) Indications from the registration data.* The archives contain a series of documents summarising overall natural population movements for several series of years. These indicators of birth and death rates were calculated from the data collected by the civil registration office (ZAGS). They enable a continuous series of birth and death rates to be constructed for the whole intercensal period. Despite the great interest in this topic, these official figures for birth and death rates between 1928 and 1937 have never been published (See Table 1).

Although there is some slight inconsistency between parts of these data, the overall pattern is clear and indicates an almost doubling of mortality in 1933 and a very severe decline in natality in 1933 and 1934. The rise in mortality at the same time as a decline in natality indicates a particularly serious situation. Since infant mortality is always higher than adult mortality, the normal level of mortality would generally fall with a decline in natality. If the data were adjusted for the age structure of the population the force of mortality would appear to be even greater.

Estimates of surplus mortality depend upon the level of mortality that is assumed to be normal.[20] Assuming that the 1932 rate of mortality (20·5 per thousand) is accepted as normal, the rise in mortality to a rate of 37·7 per thousand in 1933 would imply a level of 2·75 million excess deaths.[21]

If we were to accept a normal level of mortality as 19·7 per thousand, the elevation in mortality in 1933 would be equivalent to 2·9 million, and additional losses could be added for the higher than normal mortality in 1932 which would total another 0·1 million, i.e., 3 million excess deaths in all.

Accepting the 1932 level of natality of 31·9 per thousand as normal, the decline in natality to about 25 per thousand in 1933 and 1934 would indicate an extra decline in natality of 1·1 million for each of these years, i.e., 2·2 million in all. However, this level of loss could easily be doubled by accepting a level of 35 per thousand as normal natality and assuming that the decline in natality was also present in 1932, 1934 and 1935.

The population loss indicated by these figures varies between 5 and 7 million depending upon assumptions as to the normal levels of births and deaths. In each case about half of this loss is attributable to excess mortality and half to excess fertility decline.

Even if we accept that these figures are incomplete, and that the scale of mortality in the omitted categories was much higher than the mortality in the part of the country covered by these registration figures, it seems unlikely to me that we

TABLE 1

TsUNKhU DATA ON THE NATURAL MOVEMENT OF THE POPULATION OF THE USSR 1926–1940

| | *Crude Birth Rates (Births per 1000 Population)* | | | | *Crude Death Rates (Deaths per 1000 Population)* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 1913 | 45·6 | | 47·0 | 47·0 | 28·9 | | 30·2 | 30·2 |
| 1925 | | 44·2* | | 44·5 | | 22·9* | | 23·2 |
| 1926 | 43·7 | 43·5* | 44·0 | 44·0 | 20·0 | 19·9* | 20·3 | 20·3 |
| 1927 | 43·3 | | | 43·6 | 21·0 | | | 21·3 |
| 1928 | 42·2 | | 44·3 | 42·5 44·3 | 18·2 | | 23·3 | 18·5 23·3 |
| 1929 | 39·8 | | | 40·1 | 20·3 | | | 20·6 |
| 1930 | 37·1 | 37·9 | | 37·9 | 19·6 | 19·7 | | 19·7 |
| 1931 | 34·6 | 35·4 | | 35·4 | 19·2 | 19·6 | | 19·6 |
| 1932 | 31·0 | 31·9 | | 31·9 | 19·8 | 20·5 | | 20·5 |
| 1933 | 23·9 | 25·3 | | 25·3 | 37·8 | 37·7 | | 37·7 |
| 1934 | 24·9 | | | 25·6/26·4 | 19·7 | | | 19·8 |
| 1935 | 32·1 | | | 33·0/34·0 | 17·5 | | | 17·6 |
| 1936 | | 32·6 | | 32·6 | | 18·2 | | 18·2 |
| 1937 | | 38·8 | 38·7 | 38·7 | | 17·9 | 18·9 | 17·9/18·9 |
| 1938 | | | 37·5 | 37·5 | | | 17·5 | 17·5 |
| 1939 | | | 36·5 | 36·5 | | | 17·3 | 17·3 |
| 1940 | | | 31·2 | 31·2 | | | 18·0 | 18·0 |

*Sources:* Previously unpublished:
European part of USSR,
Columns 1,5: 1913, 1926–35: TsGANKh(SSSR), f. 1562, op. 20, d. 42, l. 85
USSR (pre-1939 boundaries)
Columns 2,6; 1930–33: TsGANKh(SSSR), f. 1562, op. 20, d. 42, l. 76
Columns 2,6; 1936–37: TsGANKh(SSSR), f. 1562, op. 20, d. 108, l. 40
Previously published:
European part of USSR,
Columns 3,7; *1925, 1926: *Estestvennoe dvizhenie naseleniya SSSR, 1926* (Moscow: 1929), p. 10
USSR (pre-1939 boundaries)
Columns 3,5; 1913, 1926, 1928, 1937–1940: *Narodnoe Khozyaistvo SSSR, 1922–1972* (Moscow: 1972), p. 40
Calculated from other columns: Column 4,8.

*Notes:*
A great degree of uncertainty relates to the currently published mortality figure for 1928, which is over 28% higher than the archival figure for European Russia only. For 1926 the currently published USSR figure was only 1·5% larger. The currently published figures show a significant growth in mortality between 1926 and 1928, while the archival source shows a fall. For reasons which will be explained below I am inclined to accept that the archival data in 1928 are somewhat more distorted than in the early 1930s.

would be able to find more than 1 or at most 2 million extra deaths to add to 2·75 to 3 million calculated above.[22]

Previously I had always argued that the demographic evidence did not incline me to believe that the scale of mortality from the 1932/33 famine was comparable with that from the 1921/22 famine and that it was unlikely to have been more than 3 to 4 million. The evidence of these registration figures inclines me to revise my position and to suggest that the scale of mortality from the 1932/33 famine may have been somewhat larger than I had earlier suggested and might be as high as 4 to 5 million.

These figures are much lower than many of the excess mortality and population loss figures that are cited in the West. Mace believes that 5–7 million for the Ukraine alone is a 'conservative figure',[23] Conquest claims 5 million Ukrainian famine deaths, and 8 million overall including the North Caucasus and Kazakhstan; but on top of this he wishes to add another 6·5 million deaths 'as a result of dekulakization'.[24] The figures given by Mace and Conquest are impossible to accept.

*(b) Indications of the population loss in the 1932/33 famine from the age structure in the 1939 census.* Because the detailed age structures of the censuses of 1937 and 1939 would have provided a graphic detailed indication of the birth and infant losses during the famine period, they were never published. Although the 1937 census materials have now been located, they were not available to me on my last visit to the Soviet Union. The following graph is based on the results of the 1939 census and provides an indication of the losses for the population of the USSR as a whole (see Figure 1).

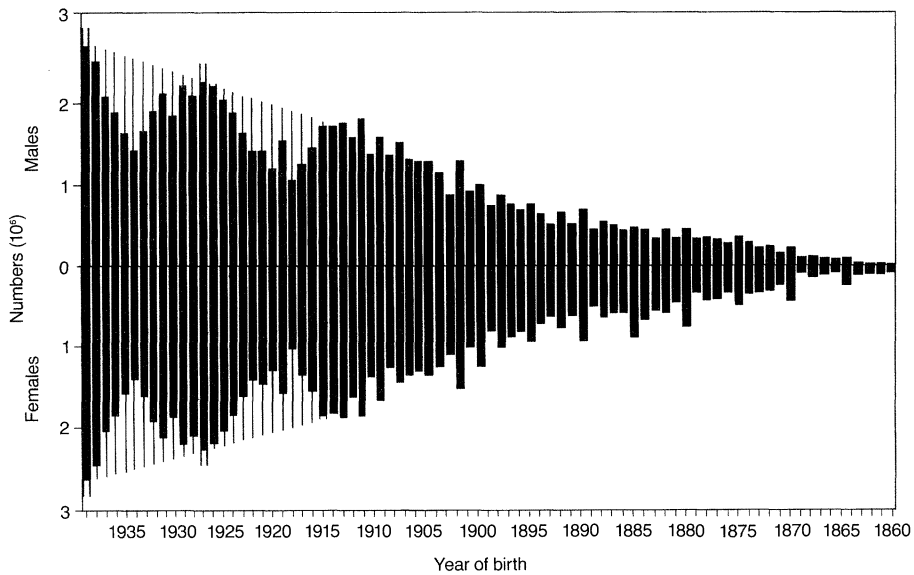


FIGURE 1. MALE AND FEMALE POPULATION IN THE USSR (IN 1939, BY AGE, IN MILLIONS).

In order to assist the conceptualisation of the extent of birth and infant losses in the 1930s and to compare it with the 1914–22 losses I have somewhat arbitrarily indicated on the graph the smooth progression from the size of the 1914 born cohorts to those born in the last two years before the census. The two gaps that emerge span the years 1914–25 and 1928–38. It can readily be calculated that the

10-year gap 1928–38 implies the loss of 11·6 million people born in these years, or 27·5% of the survivors of these cohorts. By contrast, the 11-year gap 1914–25 implies the loss of only 9·9 million of the cohort born in these years, or 26·9% of the survivors.

This very rough calculation indicates that the effect of the demographic crisis of the 1930s was comparable with and probably somewhat larger than the effect of the crisis of the war, civil war and famine, as concerns the survival of the cohorts born in these disturbed times.

*2. The regional spread of the famine*

Table 2 lists the regional mortality registration data for 1930–33. The data have been regrouped into the five major areas that I tend to use for most of my work on agricultural and demographic developments. These data are undoubtedly incomplete in several respects: some important regions like Kazakhstan are excluded; within the given regions the data are unlikely to include deaths of prisoners in labour camps, colonies and places of special exile. The mortality amongst these excluded groups would probably have been particularly high in these years.[25] Nevertheless, the indication of the scale of the demographic crisis for the civilian population covered by these data is so immense that these figures deserve careful study.

It can readily be shown that the recorded mortality in the Ukraine in 1933 was enormous and well over triple the 1930 and 1931 levels. Within the Ukraine, Kharkov and Kiev oblasts were by far the worst affected, with levels of annual mortality in 1933 more than three and a half times higher than in 1932. The levels of mortality in Vynnitsa, Odessa and Dnepropetrovsk oblasts were all between two and a half and three times the 1932 level. The only non-Ukrainian region to exceed those levels of elevation in mortality was the Lower Volga krai, where mortality rose to over three times the 1932 level. The level of mortality increase in the North Caucasus, at over two and a half times the 1932 level, was comparable with some of the Ukrainian oblasts. The level of mortality increase in the Central Chernozem, 86% above the 1932 level, was only just above the national average. By comparison, mortality increases in the Northern Industrial Consumer Region and especially in Moscow and Leningrad oblasts were far less marked.

The archival data also provide us with an urban/rural breakdown of mortality in the famine year 1933 which is presented in Table 3.

These figures indicate that in Moscow and Leningrad oblasts the level of urban mortality was very low (at roughly normal levels) and that rural mortality was only slightly raised. In the more northern and western parts of this region mortality was generally much higher, especially in the urban areas. Belorussia was reported to have had a relatively high level of urban mortality and relatively low level of rural mortality.

In the Ukraine in 1933 the level of urban mortality was reported to be about 50% above the 1932 level and about the same level as for RSFSR towns in general. However, the level of rural mortality appears to have been more than twice as large as for the RSFSR and almost three times the Ukrainian level for 1932. The

TABLE 2

REGIONAL MORTALITY DATA PER THOUSAND POPULATION CALCULATED BY TSUNKHU STATISTICIANS FROM THE AVAILABLE REGISTRATION DATA

| | *1930* | *1931* | *1932* | *1933* | *Elevation 1933/1932* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| USSR | 19·7 | 19·6 | 20·5 | 37·7 | +83·9% |
| RSFSR | 20·9 | 21·1 | 20·7 | 31·4 | +51·7% |
| UkSSR | 17·3 | 16·4 | 21·0 | 60·8 | +189·5% |
| BSSR | 14·6 | 13·3 | 12·3 | 15·2 | +23·6% |
| (1) Northern Consumer Region | | | | | |
| Northern krai | 28·6 | 28·2 | 25·1 | 35·6 | +41·8% |
| Karelia ASSR | 27·3 | 26·2 | 29·0 | 27·1 | −6·6% |
| Leningrad oblast | 18·4 | 18·7 | 19·1 | 19·6 | +2·6% |
| Western oblast | 17·8 | 17·5 | 18·2 | 18·0 | −1·1% |
| BSSR | 14·6 | 13·3 | 12·3 | 15·2 | +23·6% |
| Moscow oblast | 16·8 | 16·7 | 16·1 | 20·0 | +24·2% |
| Ivanovo oblast | 20·4 | 22·0 | 20·8 | 23·5 | +13·0% |
| Gorky oblast | 28·3 | 27·8 | 23·9 | 30·9 | +29·3% |
| (2) Southern Consumer Region | | | | | |
| (a) ZSFSR | | | | | |
| Azerbaidzhan | 21·3 | 27·0 | 34·0 | 23·6 | −30·6% |
| Georgia | 14·7 | 15·0 | 16·1 | 16·6 | +3·1% |
| Armenia | 17·3 | 15·3 | 13·5 | nd | nd |
| (b) Central Asia | | | | | |
| Uzbekistan | 23·4 | 20·2 | 26·8 | 22·8 | −14·9% |
| Turkmenia | 24·9 | 22·6 | 27·3 | 27·6 | +1·1% |
| (3) Southern Producer Region | | | | | |
| (a) Ukraine | | | | | |
| Kiev oblast | | 16·2 | 26·3 | 96·9 | +268·4% |
| Cherigov oblast | | 18·4 | 19·9 | 42·1 | +111·6% |
| Vynnitsa oblast | | 16·5 | 20·2 | 58·7 | +190·6% |
| Kharkov oblast | | 16·6 | 20·8 | 79·3 | +281·3% |
| Dnepropetrovsk oblast | | 14·4 | 17·5 | 46·8 | +167·4% |
| Odessa oblast | | 13·9 | 17·0 | 49·1 | +188·8% |
| Donetsk oblast | | 18·5 | 21·5 | 30·4 | +41·4% |
| (b) other | | | | | |
| North Caucasus Krai | 20·8 | 19·5 | 20·8 | 55·0 | +164·4% |
| Moldavian ASSR | | 17·7 | 25·1 | 59·6 | +137·5% |
| Crimean ASSR | 14·9 | 14·3 | 16·4 | 25·2 | +53·7% |
| (4) Central Producer Region | | | | | |
| (a) Central Chernozem | 19·8 | 16·8 | 16·8 | 31·3 | +86·3% |
| (b) Volga | | | | | |
| Lower Volga krai | 18·6 | 16·8 | 19·0 | 59·4 | +212·6% |
| Tatar ASSR | 22·4 | 20·4 | 17·5 | 29·3 | +67·4% |
| Bashkir ASSR | 15·3 | 20·8 | 15·0 | 24·3 | +62·0% |
| (5) Eastern Producer Region | | | | | |
| (a) Urals | 27·4 | 31·1 | 28·4 | 37·9 | +33·5% |
| (b) Siberia | | | | | |
| Western Siberia | 22·4 | 26·3 | 32·4 | 29·2 | −9·9% |
| Eastern Siberia | 19·4 | 18·2 | 21·0 | 31·3 | +49·0% |
| Far Eastern Region | 14·2 | 12·2 | 12·8 | nd | nd |
| (c) Kazakhstan | no data | | | | |

*Source:* TsGANKh (SSSR), f. 1562, op. 20, d. 42, l. 76.

TABLE 3

REGIONAL MORTALITY IN THE FAMINE WITH A RURAL/URBAN BREAKDOWN

| | 1932 | | | 1933 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Urban* | *Rural* | *Urban/Rural* | *Urban* | *Rural* | *Urban/Rural* |
| RSFSR | 22·6 | 18·9 | 119·6% | 32·1 | 33·3 | 96·4% |
| UkSSR | 20·0 | 21·3 | 93·9% | 32·2 | 67·8 | 47·5% |
| BSSR | 13·0 | 9·8 | 132·7% | 23·6 | 12·5 | 188·8% |
| (1) Northern Consumer Region | | | | | | |
| Northern krai | | | | 35·5 | 33·2 | 106·9% |
| Karelia | | | | 28·5 | 26·1 | 109·2% |
| Western | | | | 28·5 | 22·4 | 127·2% |
| Ivanovo | | | | 24·7 | 23·3 | 106·0% |
| Gorky | | | | 28·1 | 31·7 | 88·6% |
| Moscow | | | | 18·5 | 21·4 | 86·4% |
| Leningrad | | | | 18·1 | 22·0 | 82·3% |
| BSSR | | | | 23·6 | 12·5 | 188·8% |
| (2) Southern Consumer Region | | | | | | |
| (a) ZSFSR | | | no data available | | | |
| (b) C. Asia | | | no data available | | | |
| (3) SPR | | | | | | |
| (a) UkSSR | | | | | | |
| Kiev | | | | 40·3 | 96·3 | 41·8% |
| Kharkov | | | | 34·8 | 87·5 | 39·8% |
| Odessa | | | | 38·6 | 52·5 | 73·5% |
| Vinnitsa | | | | 31·8 | 59·9 | 53·1% |
| Dnepropetrovsk | | | | 29·0 | 52·5 | 55·2% |
| Donbass | | | | 24·9 | 38·9 | 64·0% |
| Chernigov | | | | 40·9 | 41·6 | 98·3% |
| (b) Other | | | | | | |
| N. Caucasus | | | | 47·1 | 57·3 | 82·2% |
| Moldavian ASSR | | | | 30·3 | 61·9 | 48·9% |
| Crimean ASSR | | | | 35·9 | 12·1 | 296·7% |
| (4) Central Producer Region | | | | | | |
| (a) Central Black Earth | | | | 39·1 | 34·1 | 114·7% |
| (b) Volga | | | | | | |
| Lower Volga | | | | 56·0 | 62·4 | 89·7% |
| Stalingrad | | | | 45·8 | 38·1 | 120·2% |
| Saratov | | | | 67·8 | 81·3 | 83·4% |
| Central Volga | | | | 79·7 | 33·9 | 235·1% |
| Tatar ASSR | | | | 44·1 | 24·0 | 183·8% |
| Bashkir ASSR | | | | 35·9 | 23·0 | 156·1% |
| (5) Eastern Producer Region | | | | | | |
| (a) Urals | | | | | | |
| Urals | | | | 37·7 | 39·4 | 95·7% |
| Sverdlovsk | | | | 35·1 | 42·6 | 82·4% |
| (b) Siberia | | | | | | |
| Chelyabinsk | | | | 41·8 | 36·6 | 114·2% |
| Obsk-Irtysh | | | | 47·4 | 33·6 | 141·1% |
| Eastern Siberia | | | no data available | | | |
| (c) Kazakhstan | | | no data available | | | |
| (d) Far Eastern Region | | | no data available | | | |

*Sources:* TsGANKh(SSSR), f. 1562, op. 20, d. 41, ll. 15–46.

Crimea seems to have been exceptional in having very low levels of rural mortality.

In the Central Producer Region there were reported to be generally very high levels of urban as well as rural mortality. Urban mortality is reported to have been much higher in this region than in the Ukraine. And although rural mortality was very high in Saratov and the Lower Volga, it appears to have been surprisingly low in the Central Volga krai, given the high level of urban mortality in this district. This could indicate that the urban mortality in the Volga was more the result of epidemic illness than of pure famine, or it could indicate a difference in policy as regards keeping the rural population out of the towns.

It is quite clear from these figures that the spread of the famine was very widespread and complex, and does not fit easily with some of the claims that have been made about particular nationalities.

### *3. The chronology of the famine in the RSFSR and the UkSSR*

Perhaps the most revealing tables in the archive are those on the chronology of the famine. Tables 4 and 5 provide an indication of the monthly mortality and natality registered for the urban and rural populations of the RSFSR and Ukraine SSR in 1932–34.[26]

It will be noted that the sharpest decline in birth rates was reported in April 1934 for both towns and countryside in the RSFSR and for the rural areas in the Ukraine. This was nine months after the peak mortality that was registered in July 1933. For the Ukrainian towns the sharpest decline in birth rates came in December 1933, which was nine months after the first sharp rise in mortality from 26·6 to 40 per thousand between February and March 1933. It may be assumed therefore that this low point in the dynamic of birth rates is reflecting a decline in conceptions rather than difficulties at the time of birth. Checking the birth rates against the death rates, there appear to be no obvious discontinuities in these series.[27]

These tables indicate that crisis mortality mounted sharply from early 1933 to reach a peak in the rural areas of the Ukraine in June 1933, and in most other areas in July 1933. This was right at the end of the 1932/33 crop season and just before the 1933 harvest. The level of crisis mortality recorded in all districts fell very sharply in August and September 1933, but for reasons explained above the low point in birth rates came later.

### *4. A few comments on the reliability of these demographic data*

There are, of course, problems concerning the reliability and the comprehensiveness of these data. No statistical data are ever absolutely accurate, and we are dealing here with a society with enormous political, economic and social problems. Most statistical systems break down when it comes to recording mortality during a famine, and the system may well have broken down in Kazakhstan and in certain parts of the Ukraine. Nevertheless, the statistical system did produce a series of results which are a reflection of the demographic crisis the society was

TABLE 4

MONTHLY POPULATION MOVEMENTS IN THE RSFSR, 1932–34

| | *Urban Population* | | | *Rural Population* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Date* | *CBR* | *CDR* | *Growth* | *CBR* | *CDR* | *Growth* |
| 1932 | | | | | | |
| January | 31·6 | 20·7 | +10·9 | 47·9 | 17·9 | +30·0 |
| February | 32·1 | 23·6 | +8·5 | 44·2 | 20·6 | +23·6 |
| March | 30·4 | 26·7 | +3·7 | 38·1 | 20·4 | +17·7 |
| April | 27·0 | 25·4 | +1·6 | 31·6 | 20·0 | +11·6 |
| May | 26·5 | 23·7 | +2·8 | 29·9 | 17·0 | +12·9 |
| June | 27·2 | 24·2 | +3·0 | 31·5 | 15·7 | +15·8 |
| July | 28·9 | 25·2 | +3·7 | 34·9 | 19·1 | +15·8 |
| August | 28·7 | 23·3 | +5·4 | 34·2 | 25·1 | +9·1 |
| September | 29·0 | 20·6 | +8·4 | 32·9 | 20·2 | +12·7 |
| October | 28·7 | 18·7 | +10·0 | 32·3 | 17·1 | +15·2 |
| November | 26·3 | 19·3 | +7·0 | 31·3 | 16·7 | +14·6 |
| December | 25·0 | 19·6 | +5·4 | 28·2 | 16·5 | +11·7 |
| 1933 | | | | | | |
| January | 24·7 | 23·7 | +1·0 | 38·7 | 22·6 | +16·1 |
| February | 25·4 | 30·3 | −4·9 | 39·0 | 30·9 | +8·1 |
| March | 23·7 | 35·6 | −11·9 | 35·9 | 35·6 | +0·3 |
| April | 22·1 | 36·5 | −14·4 | 30·2 | 35·6 | −5·4 |
| May | 20·6 | 37·0 | −16·4 | 28·4 | 38·5 | −10·1 |
| June | 21·4 | 38·8 | −17·4 | 30·7 | 44·3 | −13·6 |
| July | 22·3 | 40·0 | −17·7 | 32·4 | 47·5 | −15·1 |
| August | 22·1 | 39·7 | −17·6 | 33·4 | 43·6 | −10·2 |
| September | 20·4 | 30·0 | −9·6 | 30·3 | 32·1 | −1·8 |
| October | 19·6 | 26·7 | −7·1 | 29·1 | 25·0 | +4·1 |
| November | 16·8 | 22·8 | −6·0 | 27·5 | 21·3 | +6·2 |
| December | 17·7 | 24·2 | −6·0 | 25·0 | 22·5 | +2·5 |
| 1934 | | | | | | |
| January | 16·7 | 20·7 | −4·0 | 30·6 | 20·9 | +9·7 |
| February | 16·8 | 20·9 | −4·1 | 27·9 | 21·5 | +6·4 |
| March | 16·5 | 22·7 | −6·2 | 23·4 | 21·7 | +1·7 |
| April | 15·7 | 21·6 | −5·9 | 19·8 | 21·2 | −1·4 |
| May | 16·2 | 19·7 | −3·5 | 19·5 | 18·3 | +1·2 |
| June | 18·5 | 19·6 | −1·1 | 24·9 | 18·7 | +6·2 |
| July | 21·7 | 20·7 | +1·0 | 31·8 | 24·3 | +7·5 |
| August | 24·3 | 21·1 | +3·2 | 35·2 | 29·2 | +6·0 |
| September | 24·1 | 19·1 | +5·0 | 34·6 | 27·0 | +7·6 |
| October | 25·4 | 16·5 | +8·9 | 35·2 | 20·5 | +14·7 |
| November | 23·7 | 15·8 | +7·9 | 35·3 | 18·4 | +16·9 |
| December | 23·1 | 17·6 | +5·5 | 31·2 | 20·5 | +10·7 |

*Source:* TsGANKh (SSSR), f. 1562, op. 20, ed. 41, l. 15.

undergoing, and were certainly not the kind of results that the political authorities wanted.

I have argued elsewhere that although the central Soviet statistical system was greatly compromised by its merger into Gosplan in 1930, there was a partial renaissance of statistics when Osinsky took charge of the newly established Central Administration of National Economic Accounts (TsUNKhU) in early 1932.[28] And while it is true that Osinsky's position was soon to be weakened by the

TABLE 5

MONTHLY POPULATION MOVEMENTS IN THE UKSSR, 1932–34

| *Date* | *Urban Population* | | | *Rural Population* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *CBR* | *CDR* | *Growth* | *CBR* | *CDR* | *Growth* |
| 1932 | | | | | | |
| January | 23·9 | 13·1 | +10·8 | 35·3 | 15·1 | +20·2 |
| February | 24·4 | 15·1 | +9·3 | 32·1 | 18·0 | +14·1 |
| March | 24·5 | 18·2 | +6·3 | 28·8 | 20·6 | +8·2 |
| April | 24·0 | 20·2 | +3·8 | 26·3 | 23·0 | +3·3 |
| May | 24·3 | 18·2 | +6·1 | 24·6 | 24·1 | +0·5 |
| June | 24·5 | 23·3 | +1·2 | 23·1 | 27·3 | −4·2 |
| July | 25·4 | 28·8 | −3·4 | 26·4 | 25·2 | +1·2 |
| August | 26·7 | 24·8 | +1·9 | 24·6 | 22·9 | +1·7 |
| September | 24·6 | 20·6 | +4·0 | 22·8 | 21·4 | +1·4 |
| October | 23·0 | 20·5 | +2·5 | 21·8 | 22·4 | −0·6 |
| November | 20·3 | 19·2 | +1·1 | 18·5 | 19·1 | −0·6 |
| December | 18·5 | 17·8 | +0·7 | 14·5 | 16·6 | −2·1 |
| 1933 | | | | | | |
| January | 18·4 | 22·4 | −4·0 | 19·1 | 22·6 | −3·5 |
| February | 18·1 | 26·6 | −8·5 | 14·6 | 35·5 | −20·9 |
| March | 17·4 | 42·0 | −24·6 | 11·8 | 72·5 | −60·7 |
| April | 15·9 | 40·6 | −24·7 | 11·3 | 103·4 | −92·1 |
| May | 15·7 | 41·3 | −25·6 | 12·2 | 145·4 | −133·2 |
| June | 15·8 | 47·7 | −31·9 | 12·8 | 196·3 | −183·5 |
| July | 17·1 | 49·2 | −32·1 | 14·1 | 133·0 | −118·9 |
| August | 19·2 | 38·4 | −19·2 | 17·0 | 43·7 | −26·7 |
| September | 16·9 | 26·3 | −9·4 | 15·6 | 23·2 | −7·6 |
| October | 14·1 | 19·8 | −5·7 | 15·0 | 13·1 | +1·9 |
| November | 11·9 | 16·4 | −4·6 | 11·7 | 11·6 | +0·1 |
| December | 10·8 | 15·8 | −5·0 | 7·8 | 12·5 | −4·7 |
| 1934 | | | | | | |
| January | 12·2 | 16·2 | −4·0 | 15·6 | 17·4 | −1·8 |
| February | 12·4 | 14·5 | −2·1 | 10·3 | 15·3 | −5·8 |
| March | 12·4 | 15·7 | −3·3 | 8·1 | 18·6 | −10·5 |
| April | 12·3 | 14·5 | −2·2 | 6·8 | 15·5 | −8·7 |
| May | 14·5 | 14·4 | +0·1 | 10·1 | 13·7 | −3·6 |
| June | 18·5 | 18·9 | −0·4 | 15·0 | 15·0 | 0 |
| July | 22·9 | 21·7 | +1·2 | 23·3 | 15·7 | +7·6 |
| August | 25·0 | 22·4 | +2·6 | 32·5 | 21·8 | +10·7 |
| September | 25·7 | 22·1 | +3·6 | 35·3 | 24·9 | +10·4 |
| October | 27·1 | 21·2 | +5·9 | 37·6 | 23·1 | +14·5 |
| November | 24·3 | 15·6 | +8·7 | 35·4 | 14·6 | +20·8 |
| December | 23·9 | 16·2 | +7·7 | 27·6 | 15·5 | +18·1 |

*Sources:* TsGANKh (SSSR), f. 1562, op. 20, ed. 41, l. 16.

appointment of Kraval as his deputy, and that a hysterical Party/State decree of September 1935 was to put increasing pressure on the officials responsible for registering population movements,[29] there are grounds to believe that these demographic data for the 1932–34 period were relatively uninfected by Kraval and Stalin.

## *Conclusions*

The new material on labour camps and other repressed groups has tended to confirm my arguments that the level of population in the Gulag system in the late 1930s was below 4 to 5 million. Zemskov's figures indicate that the Gulag population (excluding colonies) reached an early peak of 1·5 million in January 1941, and this can be reconciled with Nekrasov's figures of 2·3 million at the beginning of the war, if we include prisoners in labour colonies and jail. There were also at this time a large number of *spetsposelentsy*: by 1939, according to both Ivnitsky and Zemskov, there were only 0·9 million of the original 5 or so million former kulaks in their place of exile. Even if we allow another 1·5 million for Baltic and other mass groups in *spetsposelentsy*, there would still be in the order of about 4 million. Although this represents to my mind a sufficiently large and disgraceful scale of inhumanity, these are very much smaller figures than have been proposed by Conquest and Rosefielde in the West and by Roy Medvedev and Antonov-Ovseenko in the USSR.

Concerning the scale of the famine in 1932/33, we now have much better information on its chronology and regional coverage amongst the civilian registered population. The level of excess mortality registered by the civilian population was in the order of 3 to 4 million. If we correct this for the non-civilian and non-registered population, the scale of excess mortality might well reach 4 to 5 million, which is somewhat larger than I had earlier supposed, but which is still much lower than the figures claimed by Conquest and Rosefielde and by Roy Medvedev.

Much more serious work is needed before we approach a definitive answer to the problem of the scale of repression and excess mortality, but I hope that we will finally be done with some of the unrealistic figures that have so often haunted this subject.

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[1] I am grateful to the Australian Research Council for funding my research on Soviet History, and to Melbourne University for providing me with study leave. Professor R. W. Davies as always gave me great support in this work. I am particularly pleased to be able to report the assistance that I was given in the USSR by Professor V. P. Danilov, Dr. Mark Tolts and Dr. V. Zemskov. I am also particularly grateful to Dr. Tsaplin and the archivists at TsGANKh SSSR and also to GAU SSSR.

[2] Until recently the most substantial new evidence to emerge from the Soviet Union has been the discovery of a series of mass graves in Kuropaty and elsewhere. But despite very large claims for the scale of these massacres, there is as yet little convincing evidence that they are on the scale claimed. There is a commission investigating these discoveries and it is to be hoped that their findings will soon be published.

[3] M. Tolts, 'Skol'ko zhe nas togda byli?', *Ogonek*, 1987, no. 51. See also the forthcoming article by Tolts, 'Nedostupnoe izmerenie', in: *V chelovecheskom izmerenii* (Moscow: Progress, 1989).

[4] Steven Rosefielde, 'Excess Mortality in the Soviet Union: A Reconsideration of the Demographic Consequences of Forced Industrialisation, 1929–49', *Soviet Studies*, XXXV, no. 3 (July 1983), pp. 385–405; A. Antonov-Ovseenko, *The Time of Stalin: A Portrait of Tyranny*, (New York: 1983), p. 207.

[5] V. V. Tsaplin, 'Statistika zhertv Stalinizma v 30-e gody', *Voprosy Istorii*, 1989, no. 4, pp. 175–81.

[6] I.e., labour camp inmates, labour colony inmates, exiles, special migrants, labour camp guards, etc.

[7] Tsaplin, p. 176.

[8] *Ibid.* pp. 177–8.

[9] *Ibid.* pp. 176–7.

[10] '"Arkhipelag GULAG": glazami pisatelya i statistika', *Argumenty i fakty*, 1989, no. 45 (11–17 November), pp. 6–7.

[11] *Argumenty i fakty*, 1989, no. 39 (30 September–6 October).

[12] *Argumenty i fakty*, 1989, no. 40 (7–13 October).

[13] *Argumenty i fakty*, 1989, no. 38 (23–29 September).

[14] These figures have been calculated from the reported numbers of deaths in the camps and the average number of inmates given by Zemskov in *Argumenty i fakty*, 1989, no. 4–5.

[15] Over 5 million kulaks (including members of families) had been exiled in 1930–32. Zemskov further cites a figure originally given by Ivnitsky indicating that 990,470 of these original kulaks (including families) were still located in their place of exile in 1939. Many of these former kulaks would have been unlisted victims in the famine of 1932/33, the war-time difficulties of 1942 and 1943 and also the famine of 1947/48.

[16] V. Zemskov, *Argumenty i fakty*, 1989, no. 40. 51,848 were classified as *ssylno-poselentsy* (resettled exiles), 7,605 as *ssylnye* (exiles) and 5,869 as *vyslannye* (banished).

[17] The discrepancy of 0·4 million presumably indicates the number of prisoners released or escaped during this period.

[18] V. F. Nekrasov, 'Desyat' "Zheleznykh Narkomov"', *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, 29 September 1989.

[19] In the recent debates on this subject Rosefielde had proposed a figure of over 10 million in the Gulag system in the late 1930s (S. Rosefielde, *Soviet Studies*, XXXIII, no. 1 (January 1981), pp. 51–87) and Conquest had proposed a figure of 8 million in the camps in 1938 (R. Conquest, *The Great Terror*, (Harmondsworth: 1971) Appendix A, p. 709) I have repeatedly argued that I could see no convincing evidence that the scale of labour camp prisoners (excluding exiles) could have been more than 4 to 5 million. (S. G. Wheatcroft, *Soviet Studies*, XXXIII, no. 2 (April 1981), *Soviet Studies*, XXXV, no. 2 (April 1983), and forthcoming *Voprosy istorii*, 1990.

[20] See Barbara A. Anderson and Brian D. Silver, 'Demographic Analysis and Population Catastrophes in the USSR', *Slavic Review*, (Fall 1985), pp. 517–36 for a thorough discussion of this truth.

[21] $160 \times (0{\cdot}0377 - 0{\cdot}0205) = 2{\cdot}75$ millions.

[22] According to Tsaplin, Kurman, the deputy head of the Department of Population and Health Statistics in TsUNKhU, believed that the scale of under-reporting of mortality was 1 million among the civil population, and that deaths in the non-civil population, 1926–37, would reach 1·5 million. See note 9.

[23] James E. Mace, 'The Famine of 1933: A Survey of Sources', in: R. Serbyn & B. Krawchenko, eds., *Famine in Ukraine 1932–1933*, (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1986), p. 50.

[24] R. Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivisation and the terror famine* (London: Hutchinson, 1986), p. 306.

[25] Although the Zemskov data mentioned above allow us to assess the scale of population in the labour camps in these years as rising from 268,700 in January 1932 to 510,307 in January 1934, the figures for mortality in the camps are only given from 1934. Deaths from starvation may be assumed to have been particularly high in the places of kulak exile, where some 5 million people were exiled.

[26] Monthly data are also available for most of the separate regions and the major cities for this period. These more detailed data will be analysed elsewhere.

[27] Conquest has claimed that the registration system for births and deaths was disbanded after October 1932. (Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*), but he offers no convincing evidence for this, and there are surprisingly few indications of disruption in the available series of data. Considering the enormity of the crisis, it is indeed remarkable that the system was able to collect these data.

[28] S. G. Wheatcroft, 'Statistical Sources for the Study of the Social History of the USSR', in: S. Fitzpatrick and L. Viola eds., Sources for the Study of the Social History of the USSR, published as a special issue of *Russian History/Histoire Russe*, 12, nos. 2–4, 1985, pp. 217–46.

[29] This is the notorious decree accusing the registration officials with double-recording deaths and under-recording births. See 'O postanovke ucheta estestvennogo dvizheniya naseleniya', *Sobranie zakonov*, 1935, no. 54, article 432, dated 21 September 1935.