

This article was downloaded by: [University of Montana]

On: 06 April 2015, At: 11:32

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954

Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Soviet Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ceas19>

### Towards a thorough analysis of Soviet forced labour statistics

S. G. Wheatcroft<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Birmingham

Published online: 06 Nov 2007.

To cite this article: S. G. Wheatcroft (1983) Towards a thorough analysis of Soviet forced labour statistics, *Soviet Studies*, 35:2, 223-237, DOI: [10.1080/09668138308411473](https://doi.org/10.1080/09668138308411473)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09668138308411473>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly



## TOWARDS A THOROUGH ANALYSIS OF SOVIET FORCED LABOUR STATISTICS

By S. G. WHEATCROFT\*

It does not particularly surprise me that Robert Conquest should enter the debate over Soviet forced labour statistics on the side of Professor Rosefelde and that he should consider that despite Rosefelde's methodological errors he has still come to 'the nub of the matter'.<sup>1</sup> Rosefelde, after all, does support Conquest's views and was quite explicit in saying that he was using primarily the same sources that Conquest used in his statistical appendices to *The Great Terror*.<sup>2</sup>

What does surprise me is that Conquest should persist in his extremely high estimates of the size of Soviet forced concentration camp labour and that he should accuse those who disagree with him of 'distorting' and 'inadequately checking' 'statistical evidence', and of using arguments which 'amount to no more than a combination of sophistical algebra and unwarranted parochial assumptions'.<sup>3</sup>

In this article I would like to reply to Conquest's criticisms of my arguments, and to some of his own arguments in support of his view of the scale of concentration camp labour. I would also like to take this opportunity to supplement my earlier article, 'On Assessing the Size of Forced Concentration Camp Labour in the Soviet Union, 1931-56',<sup>4</sup> with some American archival material that I saw after the publication of that article.<sup>5</sup>

### *A Conquest's criticisms of my assessment of the size of the camp population*

(i) Conquest wishes to ignore all the statistical work on the employment structure of the population in 1939 by claiming that the 1939 census is known to be a 'fake'. He refers us to 'the genuine 1937 census' which was 'suppressed because census chief, Kvitkin, and his fellows were "traitors exerting themselves to diminish the population of the USSR"', and he suggests that the 1939 census over-estimates the true level of the population by 2-3 million.<sup>6</sup>

I would not deny that there are problems in dealing with the 1939 census, but the balance of the evidence does not indicate that it is seriously falsified.<sup>7</sup> It is widely accepted by most Western demographers, including Lorimer.

But even if the 1939 census were distorted along the lines claimed by Conquest, this would in fact only weaken his own position. If we were to decrease the size of the 1939 population by 2-3 million as Conquest wants us to do, it would be more difficult to fit in the 4-5 million concentration camp labourers which seem to be compatible with the published census data.<sup>8</sup> It would be even more difficult to find room for Conquest's nine or 10 million. In order to make room for 9-10 million concentration camp labourers, Conquest would need to argue that the 1939 census under-estimated the real level of population, not that it over-estimated it. However, this would in turn imply that

mortality between the 1926 and 1939 censuses was not as high as appears from the published result of the two censuses, and Conquest would be reluctant to accept that. May I invite Conquest to show us how his 9–10 million concentration camp labourers can be made compatible with a total population in 1939 of 167–8 millions?

(ii) The disenfranchised part of the population: Conquest initially cited a figure of 17.6 million for 1938 from a 1976 Radio Liberty document, as against my figure of 4.7 million. Conquest admitted that he had not checked these sources. In fact the difference between my figure and the Radio Liberty figure is simply due to the fact that Mr S. Voronitsyn, the Radio Liberty researcher concerned, mistakenly used the 1939 population figures not for the pre-1939 area of the USSR, but for its post-1945 area, i.e. 190.7 million instead of 170.6 million. The size of the 18+ age-group in comparable pre-1939 boundaries of the USSR should therefore be not 111.3 million as given by Voronitsyn in 1976, but rather 98.4 million as given in my appendix, as Voronitsyn and Conquest now concede.<sup>9</sup> The size of the disenfranchised part of the population is consequently not 17.7 million but 4.7 million, as stated in my article.

(iii) The production data of the 1941 plan: On this Conquest has nothing to say!

We consequently see that Conquest offers no serious evidence to challenge my arguments on the size of the camp population. The conclusions that I made on the basis of the available evidence that 'some 4–5 million is the maximum number of concentration camp labourers who could have existed in 1939',<sup>10</sup> therefore stands.

#### *B Conquest's own assessment of the size of the camp population*

Conquest offers us what he describes as 'a far more substantial' approach to estimating the size of the camp population. I am somewhat reluctant to follow up and reply in detail to all the points that Conquest's article raises. Most of the points concern questions where our ignorance is immense and where it is possible to make a whole range of more or less sensible-looking assumptions that provide scope for a wide range of conclusions. It would be rather sterile to argue for long on the basis of such a poor data base. I will consequently restrict myself to pointing to the sensitivity and reliability of the assumptions made by Conquest, except in those cases where the data are sufficiently reliable to warrant more detailed examination.

(i) Calculating camp populations from prison capacities and prison/labour camp ratios: Conquest's argument rests on two assumptions (1) that there were at least one million people in places of detention other than labour camps in 1937 and 1938; (2) that all these prisoners were transferred to labour camps and that they averaged only 3–4 months in prison throughout their entire period of confinement. Let us look at the evidence relating to both of these assumptions.

*First assumption:* Conquest's main reason for believing that there were one million people in places of detention other than labour camps is his assumption that there were more people in prison in 1937 and 1938 than there were in May 1933 when a secret Stalin–Molotov decree stated that there were 800,000 in such places of detention.<sup>11</sup> But this seems dubious for at least two reasons. First, May 1933 was the end of a period of mass repression that is likely to have been on a much larger scale than in 1937. Second, in May 1933 there were evidently still a large number of people in prison who had been sentenced to imprisonment for a number of years, but for some reason were

not being transferred to labour camps or exile. By 1937 there were likely to be fewer prisoners in this category. Let us look at each of these points in turn.

The preamble to the secret May 1933 decree makes it quite clear that it is concerned with a change in the policy on repression in connection with a new stage in 'the struggle for the elimination of the kulak class and the victory of the collective farms'. The decree stated that acts of mass repression had been 'necessary' in the countryside over the last three years in order to combat 'arson', 'terroristic acts against collective farm activists', and 'all kinds of saboteurs', and it even admitted that these acts of repression, 'as is well known, have affected not only kulaks but also individual peasants and partly also kolkhoz peasants'. But it went on to argue that 'the dangers of impoverishment and famine' were now pulling the individual peasant into the collective farms and that it was consequently possible 'to stop the application of mass exile and sharp forms of repression in the countryside'. The preamble continued by regretting that 'many comrades in the oblasts and kraia have not understood the new circumstances and are continuing to live in the past'.<sup>12</sup>

This then was the main reason why the prisons were so full. The local officials were continuing to arrest people in the spirit of mass repression and mass dekulakisation. And Conquest provides no solid grounds for assuming that the number imprisoned in 1937 exceeded or equalled the numbers imprisoned in connection with the mass rural repression of 1929-33.

Moreover, there is considerable evidence to indicate that in 1933 places of confinement other than labour camps and colonies were continuing to hold a high proportion of sentenced prisoners, including kulaks. Instructions dating back as far as July 1929<sup>13</sup> had stated that prisoners sentenced to more than three years should be transferred to the camps and colonies of the *OGPU*, and that all shorter term sentences should be to forced labour in the *NKYust* colonies. But it is clear that this instruction was not being carried out. On 1 November 1931, 27.5% of all the prisoners in the *NKYust* system were reported to be serving sentences of over three years without being handed over to the *OGPU*.<sup>14</sup> In May 1933 there were still many in prisons serving sentences of over three years. This is evident from the fact that the Stalin/Molotov decree specifically stated that 'those prisoners who had been sentenced to 3-5 years were to be transferred from the prisons to *OGPU* labour settlements (colonies)', and 'those sentenced to more than five years were to be sent to the *OGPU* camps'. The decree also indicated that these categories included some kulaks: it specifically stated that 'kulaks who had been sentenced to 3-5 years were to be directed to the labour settlements together with their dependents'.<sup>15</sup>

The position had undoubtedly changed by 1937, partly as a consequence of this decree, but also because the prisons and the camps had been placed in the single all-union *NKVD* system after its formation in 1934. Only after this date can we assume that the prisons would be relatively clear of long-term inmates. Furthermore, in May 1933, most of the prisoners held in connection with rural repression would be located in small-town jails and often in temporary accommodation. Subjective comparisons of the relative degree of over-crowding in the Moscow and other central prisons will not help us here.

As a supplementary argument, Conquest makes a rough guess at the number of

prisoners in Moscow in 1937—50,000,<sup>16</sup> multiplied by the relative share of the population of Moscow oblast (9 million) to the entire population of the USSR (170 million), i.e.

$50,000 \times \frac{170}{9} = 944,000$ . Conquest does admit, 'Moscow is indeed not entirely typical.

Its high concentration of party members and government officials were particularly liable to arrest'.<sup>17</sup> However, he qualifies this by following it with the statement, 'on the other hand, ordinary citizens are usually reported to have suffered less than the norm, and in general these factors are believed to balance out'. This argument does not make sense. How can the fact that Moscow has a smaller share of ordinary population (i.e. not party members or government officials) than other areas *compensate* for the fact that it has a higher share of party members and government officials? It is quite clear that Moscow suffered far more heavily in the *Ezhovshchina* than elsewhere (except possibly Leningrad). Incidentally, the estimate that the prisoner population in the *Butyrka* was as much as 30,000 would certainly require some further justification.

Neither in his main arguments nor in his supplementary arguments has Conquest been able to prove that prison populations of one million in 1937 and 1938 are at all likely.

*Second Assumption:* that in 1937–38 'the average time spent in prison ... is widely reported as about 3–4 months'.<sup>18</sup> Conquest offers no evidence for this assumption.

Individual biographies of political prisoners (such as Evgenia Ginzberg,<sup>19</sup> and Elinor Lipper,<sup>20</sup> describe far longer periods in prison. Some political prisoners were kept in isolators for a long time and some of the non-political prisoners would have served longer than 3–4 months and, of course, there were also non-political prisoners who were kept in prison on remand and who never appeared in the camps at all. This question requires far more extensive study. But clearly the procedure of dividing a highly unreliable deduced prison population of one million or more by a highly unreliable indication of average time (three or six months) spent in prison is extremely dubious.

The prison population may well have been far less than indicated by Conquest, and he provides no solid evidence that the average time spent in prison was as short as he suggests, so his conclusions are likely to be greatly exaggerated.

(ii) Estimates of party arrests from the decline in party membership: Conquest objects to my rejection of Brzezinski's and Sakharov's estimates of the numbers of party members imprisoned between 1936 and 1939. He admits that Brzezinski got his dates confused, but still claims that his estimates show a million party arrests.

There is, of course, no need to use Brzezinski's estimates of party membership. Official figures for these years have been published; and everyone, including Conquest, accepts that the difference between the official figures and Brzezinski's figures are due to 'a simple confusion of dates'<sup>21</sup> by Brzezinski.

The annual series of figures on full and candidate membership of the party from 1 January 1928 to 1 January 1941 are given in the table below:

Conquest claims that these figures indicate at least one million party arrests and are compatible with Sakharov's claim that, 'in 1936 to 1939 alone more than 1.2 million party members were arrested'. This is sustained only by transferring the initial starting point of the comparison from 1936 to 1933, and then applying the following two assumptions: (1) candidate members either achieved full membership within three years or left the

NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF CPSU  
(1 January) in thousands

	Full Members	Candidate Members	Total
1928	914	392	1,304
1929	1,091	445	1,535
1930	1,185	493	1,678
1931	1,369	843	2,212
1932	1,770	1,347	3,117
1933	2,204	1,351	3,555
1934	1,827	874	2,701
1935	1,659	700	2,359
1936	1,490	587	2,077
1937	1,454	528	1,982
1938	1,406	514	1,920
1939	1,514	793	2,307
1940	1,983	1,417	3,400
1941	2,490	1,382	3,872

Source: 'KPSS v tsifrakh', *Partiinaya zhizn'*, No. 18, 1967, p. 9. For a further discussion of these figures see T. H. Rigby, *Communist Party Membership in the USSR, 1917-1967*, Princeton, 1968, p. 212 and A. L. Unger, 'Stalin's Renewal of the Leading Stratum: a Note on the Great Purge', *Soviet Studies*, vol. XX, No. 3 (January 1969), pp. 321-30.

party; (2) most (in his book *Conquest* suggests 75%) of the full or candidate members who left the party organisation were arrested.

There is little evidence to support these assumptions. There was a freeze on party recruitment between June 1933 and January 1937 which undoubtedly stopped the promotion of candidate members to full membership. In the year following, i.e. in 1937, there were 83,000 new party members.<sup>22</sup> Of the estimated 1.3 million people who left the party during the party purge (June 1933-May 1935), only 613,000 were expelled; 56,000 were transferred to the status of sympathiser and 469,000 of those listed in June 1933 simply failed to appear before the purge commission and so, by default, left the party.<sup>23</sup> Of those expelled only a minority would have been guilty of political deviancy, many more were alleged to be lacking in moral qualities, sobriety, and basic political literacy. The largest reason for the fall in membership of the rank and file was clearly the apathy and incompetence of a large part of the membership.<sup>24</sup>

In the following stages of the verification of party documents (May 1935-April 1936) and of the exchange of party documents (April-September 1936) about 261,000 party members were expelled by their local committees, but over 167,000 were reinstated. Between October 1936 and the end of 1937 in the terrifying years of the *Ezhovshchina* only 108,000 party members were expelled and just under half this number, 46,000, were reinstated. In the following year (1938) 81,000 were expelled and an unknown number reinstated. There were consequently between 200,000 and 240,000 party members who were expelled and not reinstated between May 1935 and January 1939 and it may be assumed that a fairly high proportion of these were arrested. There is, however, little evidence to suggest that those who voluntarily dropped out of the party or who were demoted to sympathisers would have been arrested. Amongst those who left in the earlier period it is uncertain how many would have been arrested. *Conquest's* assumption that 1-1.2 million party members were arrested is very difficult to believe.

(iii) Estimates of the number of prison camp labourers in Kolyma. *Conquest* seems

offended because I wrote that his book on Kolyma added little to the earlier estimates made by Dallin and Nicolaevsky on the size of the camp population in Kolyma.

Perhaps I was a little harsh. Conquest does use other data than the defecting Russian seaman's account of sea transport to Nagayevo. But he does describe the evidence of prison ships on the Nagayevo run as being, 'the most detailed and substantial part of our evidence'.<sup>25</sup> In Appendix A in his book, Conquest does provide a useful list of the ships reported to be on the Nagayevo run, together with details of capacities etc. But his evidence on the number of trips per year and the prisoner capacities, although somewhat different from the Dallin and Nicolaevsky estimate, does not really have much more to say for it (I did not say that it produced identical results).

Conquest favours an estimate of five main ships, each containing 4,000 prisoners making 10–11 trips per year, i.e.  $5 \times 4,000 \times 10$  (or 11) = 200,000 (220,000). However, for 1938 he does make a higher estimate of six ships with 5,000 prisoners and 10 trips, i.e. 300,000.<sup>26</sup>

The un-named sailor in *Sotsialisticheskii Vestnik* in 1946 estimated four ships with 6,000–9,000 prisoners making 12–15 trips per year (i.e.  $4 \times (6,000–9,000) \times (12–15)$  = 288,000–540,000).<sup>27</sup>

Dallin and Nicolaevsky noted that there were probably six more ships on the run with an additional capacity of 35,000 prisoners. This would presumably allow a figure of 720,000–1,350,000 to be calculated.<sup>28</sup> But they also noted that these ships would be carrying a cargo some of the time. They therefore decided to halve the figures and concluded, 'the importation of from 400,000–500,000 slave colonists each year appears credible'.<sup>29</sup>

Despite Conquest's repeated statement that he is making cautious estimates, the figures on the numbers of annual sailings and the numbers of prisoners on board, as opposed to cargo, are really nothing short of guesses handed down from subjective sources. Perhaps some of our Japanese colleagues could assist us with some hard evidence on the volume of Soviet shipping in these waters.<sup>30</sup>

(iv) Estimate of the camp population from the number of executions: Conquest claims that the 9,000 corpses discovered in Vinnitsa in 1943 indicate that in 1938 there were a million executions in the USSR as a whole. He then combines this result with an assumption based on an emigré survey carried out by Brzezinski that 10–11% of all sentences were to death, in order to conclude that about 9 million people were sent to the labour camps in 1938.<sup>31</sup> Conquest considers these to be 'conservative' and 'modest' estimates.

His estimates are based on the following three assumptions: (1) that the international medical commission was correct in establishing the date of execution of all these corpses to be 1938; (2) that a similar number of executions were carried out in each oblast in the USSR; and (3) that Brzezinski's sample of emigrés was providing accurate objective reports of the number of death sentences and that these death sentences were carried out.

I am not in a position to question the first assumption. The second and third assumptions seem to me to be totally unlikely. But since the likely errors in them would effect the result in different directions, we must try to establish some order of magnitude of the likely error.



How typical was Vinnitsa? Was there a Vinnitsa in every oblast, as Conquest would have us believe? (i.e. well over 100 similar places in the whole USSR). Cases are reported of several mass executions in 1938 further east and Solzhenitsyn has suggested that executions were certainly more frequent in 1938 than in other years:

In 1938, there was an extreme impatience to shoot on the part of the higher-ups! They shot as many as they could in all the camps, but they shot the most in Kolyma (The 'Garanin' executions) and in Vorkuta (the 'Kashketin' executions).<sup>32</sup>

Neither Solzhenitsyn nor Dallin and Nicolaevsky made an estimate of the numbers executed by Garanin,<sup>33</sup> but they agreed that Kashketin had executed between 1,000 and 3,000 'Trotskyists'.<sup>34</sup>

Given the scale of the 'Kashketin' executions and the admittedly larger scale of the Garanin executions, it seems unlikely that there could have been many other sites of execution where 9,000 prisoners were executed.

Concerning the third assumption, I think that it would be very rash to assume that the interviewed emigrés were an entirely objective group with no tendency to exaggerate the horrors of life in the Soviet Union. There is also the problem of whether they knew what the fate of their friends and relatives had been once they had been arrested. Solzhenitsyn himself notes that there was a clear reluctance of the prison authorities to execute prisoners even when they had been sentenced to death.<sup>35</sup> He explains this behaviour as a result of the following situation:

(the prison) administration, which was closely associated with Gulag, looked at prisoners from the economic point of view. To them the important *figures* were not an increase in the number of executions but an increase in the manpower sent out to the Archipelago.<sup>36</sup>

We consequently have the situation in which Vinnitsa is not at all typical of most blasts, where mass executions in the camps affected those not originally sentenced to death and where many of those sentenced to death had their sentences commuted.

(v) Calculating excess mortality from the demographic data: Conquest concluded his 'Comments' by stating that 'the excess mortality' from the labour camps and executions could be calculated from the demographic materials, 'and that this gives us figures for 1937-38, which are incompatible with the low general arrest rate suggested by Wheatcroft'.<sup>37</sup>

What Conquest appears to have in mind here is the observable difference in sex ratios for the different age groups recorded in the 1959 census. Referring to these data in *The Great Terror*, Conquest wrote:

Precise deductions are not possible. . . . But in any case, the general effect of the figures is clear enough. The wastage of millions of males in the older age groups is too great to be masked, whatever saving assumptions we may make. We here have, frozen into the census figures, a striking indication of the magnitude of the losses inflicted in the Purge.<sup>38</sup>

Although I would not claim that we can get any precise results, a much more accurate indication can be obtained of the scale of excess mortality in specific age groups than Conquest implies.

In his analysis Conquest looked purely at the sex ratios for the different age cohorts as they appeared in the 1959 census. He argues, correctly as far as I can see, that deaths in the

camps and by execution in the late 1930s affected predominantly males aged between 35 and 39. These would be registered as the 55–59 age cohort in the 1959 census. The effect of the war losses on this group is likely to have been less than for the younger males in the 50–54 age cohort or for that matter for any cohorts down to the 35–39 age group. But, having established from the 1959 census that the losses to the 55–59 age male cohort were greater than the losses to the younger age male cohorts, Conquest abandons the analysis and returns to talking about millions. I think that we can do better than that. Let us consider the real cohorts born in the five-year periods from 1890–1924, and the 10-year periods from 1870–89. Their history is as follows:

Cohort	Age in the following periods:					
	1914–18	1927	1937	1939	1941–55	1959
1920–1924	—	3–7	13–17	15–19	17–25	35–39
1915–1919	—	8–12	18–22	20–24	22–30	40–44
1910–1914	0–4	13–17	23–27	25–29	27–35	45–49
1905–1909	5–9	18–22	28–32	30–34	32–40	50–54
1900–1904	10–14	23–27	33–37	35–39	37–45	55–59
1895–1900	15–19	28–32	38–42	40–44	42–50	60–64
1890–1894	20–24	33–37	43–47	45–49	47–55	65–69
1880–1889	25–34	38–47	48–57	50–59	52–65	70–79
1870–1879	35–44	48–57	58–67	60–69	62–75	80–89

The sex ratios and their changes over the period for these particular cohorts are as follows:

Number of men per thousand women				Decline from 1927 to 1959	
Cohort	1927	1959	Observed	Expected	
1920–1924	1,002	641	36.0%	35.8	} War Losses
1915–1919	1,024	624	39.2%		
1910–1914	979	623	36.4%		
1905–1909	931	623	33.1%		
1900–1904	851	502	41.0%	35.8	} Natural Ageing Progression
1895–1900	878	540	38.5%		
1890–1894	900	533	40.8%		
1880–1889	955	487	49.0%		
1870–1879	868	417	52.0%		

Sources: 1927 from 1926 census (December 17) from F. Lorimer, *The population of the Soviet Union*, Geneva, 1946, pp. 231–33. 1959 from 1959 census from *Itogi vsesoyuznoi perepisi naseleniya 1959 goda. SSSR (Svodnyi tom)*, 1962, p. 74. Observed decline calculated from 1927 and 1959 ratios. Expected decline, see text.

The normal ageing process leads to a greater sexual imbalance in older age groups. However, the 1941–45 war would have resulted in a greater sexual imbalance in the younger age groups. The increase in the sexual imbalance in the 1900–04 born cohort to 502 males per thousand women in 1959 is indeed strikingly irregular. Since it affects an age group which was 37–45 during the war and whose losses must have been less than

for younger cohorts, we cannot explain this irregularity in terms of wartime losses. We also cannot explain it in terms of the normal ageing process, since it is more than the imbalance for the older 1895–1900 and 1890–94 born cohorts. It must be a reflection of an unusually high level of male skewed mortality in some other years between 1927 and 1959—presumably deaths from the camps and executions in the late 1930s. But what order of magnitude is this excess mortality in this cohort? We can make a fairly good guess at the excess of mortality in this group in comparison with others by selecting a value that would give us a smoother transfer from young wartime losses and natural ageing losses. Such a value would be 35.8%.<sup>39</sup> The difference between the observed increase in sexual imbalance to 41% and the expected increase (given no excess mortality) to 35.8% is 5.2%. We can, therefore, expect the excess in mortality to account for 5.2% of the male 1900–04 born cohort recorded in 1927, i.e.  $(5.2/100) \times 5.967$  million = about 10,000.

This is about the order of magnitude that I would have expected for the excess in mortality from executions and life in the camps of males in this age group. If we included other age groups and females, the numbers of extra deaths may well rise to over one million, but is certainly much less than the 12+ million claimed by Conquest.<sup>40</sup>

#### *American archival material on the Soviet labour camps*

Finally, a note concerning other American archival material on the Soviet labour camps. In his article Rosefielde stated that ‘previously undisclosed State Department records’, containing ‘official US Embassy data, compiled in Moscow during the Second World War, show that there were roughly 12 million forced labourers in the Gulag in the early forties’.<sup>41</sup> Rosefielde admitted that ‘a comprehensive investigation of these data has not yet been undertaken’, and added in a footnote, ‘these data have just been declassified and can be studied in the National Archives’.<sup>42</sup>

In my article I was unable to report more than that I had been unable to trace this source from England.<sup>43</sup> Since then, thanks to the Kennan Institute, I have been able to spend a few weeks in Washington, and I naturally attempted to trace and check up on this source.

The archivists were unable to find any recently declassified Embassy materials on the ‘camps’ populations, or any war-time instructions from the State Department to the Embassy to make such an estimate.

In 1936, in response to a request from the Attorney General, who was compiling a handbook on prisons, the State Department did instruct the Embassy in Moscow to ascertain the scale of penal labour in the Soviet Union, and the Embassy made several official requests on this matter to the Soviet government.<sup>44</sup>

The Soviet government did not respond to these requests and the State Department was not prepared to go further than inform the Attorney General that ‘the number of convicts is commonly supposed to be very large’.<sup>45</sup>

I have been unable to find any other references in the US State Department materials to attempts by the Embassy to assess the size of Soviet forced labour. Since the diplomatic materials showed nothing I consulted the available intelligence service materials.

In 1948 a classified report on ‘Forced Labour in the USSR and satellite countries,

Part 1, the USSR' of the Office of Intelligence and Research of the US State Department, cited the calculations of H. Schwartz and Dallin and Nicolaevsky, that there were 13.5 million involuntary workers in the USSR in 1940.<sup>46</sup>

An unclassified report of the Research and Analysis division of the OSS, entitled, 'Forced Labor in the Soviet Union', was produced in 1952 and subsequently published. This, however, was not prepared to be more specific than to state 2–20 million.<sup>47</sup>

By 1960, however, one of the successors of the Research and Analysis Division of the OSS, the bureau of intelligence and research of the Department of State, in a classified report, indicated that there had been a change of opinion. This report reviewed the earlier subjective estimates of the camp population:

Estimates by Western scholars of the immediate pre-war size of the penal population have ranged from 3.3 million to 13.5 million and higher. A major study based on reports of former forced labourers estimated the total number of prisoners in 1940–2 at 10 million (plus or minus 20%) and in 1950 at 12 million (plus or minus 10%).

However, it then stated:

These estimates are now admitted to have been much too high. A prisoner population of such a magnitude would have meant that nearly one-fifth of all adult males were imprisoned. So disastrous would have been the demographic and economic consequences of such a situation that its existence seems to have been highly improbable.<sup>48</sup>

The report then went on to cite three different sources of data which provided much lower evaluations for the 1950s. These figures are given in the following table in comparison with Rosefielde's and Conquest's figures:

Year	US Dept of State, Intelligence and Research Bureau			Rosefielde	Conquest
	(a) Maximum	(b) Minimum Kudryavtsev/ Berman	(c) Disenfranchised residual		
1950				12–15	12–14
1951			3.8–4.3	} 10–12	
1952	4.8				
1953	4.6	3.0			
1954	3.5		2.3–2.8		
1955	3.0			8	
1956	2.2			6	
1957		0.8–0.9		4	
1958					
1959			1.0–1.5	4	

Sources: US Dept of State, Intelligence and Research Bureau, see NARS, I and R Report No. 8353, *Current penal policy in the USSR*, October 1960, pp. 3–5. See Appendix 2 for more detail. Rosefielde, *ibid.*, p. 65. These figures refer to Rosefielde's concept L2 (i.e. total camp labour force including service workers). Conquest, *Kolyma*, p. 223.

## D Conclusion

This is an extremely important and complex question that requires extremely careful attention. Nothing is to be gained by claiming that the picture is clearer than it really is,

or that all the evidence points in one direction and that those who fail to accept this are distorting the evidence and engaging in sophistry.

I do believe that the bulk of the evidence is in favour of accepting a lower series of figures than those advocated by Rosefelde and Conquest. The evidence set out above shows fairly conclusively that Conquest's criticisms of my estimates are mistaken, and that his own estimates are erroneous or unreliable. The additional evidence from the US archives also supports this view.

*University of Birmingham*

#### Notes

\* My work forms part of a project on Soviet Economic History in the 1930s, financed by the British Social Science Research Council. I am grateful to the other members of the Birmingham Soviet Economic and Social History Group (R. W. Davies, John Barber, Julian Cooper and Peter Gooderham) for comments on a draft of this article.

<sup>1</sup> R. Conquest, 'Forced Labour Statistics; Some Comments', *Soviet Studies*, July 1982, No. 3, p. 438.

<sup>2</sup> S. Rosefelde, 'An Assessment of the Sources and Uses of Forced Labour, 1929-1956', *Soviet Studies*, January 1981, No. 1, p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> Conquest, *op. cit.*, p. 438.

<sup>4</sup> S. G. Wheatcroft, *Soviet Studies*, April 1981, No. 2, pp. 276-295.

<sup>5</sup> I am grateful to the Kennan Institute for giving me a grant and enabling me to work in Washington on the National Archives in May 1981.

<sup>6</sup> Conquest, *op. cit.*, p. 436. The quotation came from *Pravda*, January 18, 1939 and referred to Kraval, the political leader of the Central Statistical Administration (*TsUNKhU*) and not to the statistician Kvitkin. Unlike Kvitkin, Kraval could never be suspected of being a champion of statistical objectivity. No source is given for the estimated 2-3 million over-estimate.

<sup>7</sup> One of the problems is that the army and the camps' population are not listed in the regions in which they were located, but rather in the region where they were recruited or arrested.

<sup>8</sup> See S. G. Wheatcroft, *op. cit.*, pp. 279-284 and 286.

<sup>9</sup> I am grateful to Keith Bush of Radio Liberty for so readily responding to my request for more details on this Radio Liberty calculation and for asking Mr. Voronitsyn to re-check his figures. Voronitsyn's errors were readily conceded in a private communication to me in August 1982 and Bush duly wrote to Conquest concerning them. In his letter in the January 1983 issue Conquest admits that the Radio Liberty figures were 'in gross error'. He now apparently agrees with my figures that he initially attacked but claims that it makes no difference to his argument, whether there were 4.7 million or 17.6 million disenfranchised in 1938!

<sup>10</sup> S. G. Wheatcroft, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

<sup>11</sup> 'All accounts agree that crowding was much greater in 1937/38 than at any previous period: we can take 1000,000 as a minimum, at any rate'. Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 699. In his recent article, Conquest went even further, 'it can hardly be less: it might be double!' (p. 436).

<sup>12</sup> See *Smolensk Archives*, WKP 178, p. 134.

<sup>13</sup> See Peter H. Solomon, Jr., 'Soviet Penal Policy, 1917-1934: a re-interpretation', *Slavic Review*, vol. 39, No. 2 (June 1980), pp. 210-11 on the secret decree of July 1929 and *Sobranie Zakonov*, No. 22, 1930, for a published decree on the same point in April 1930.

<sup>14</sup> *Sovetskaya Yustitsiya*, No. 3, 1932, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> *Smolensk Archives*, WKP 178, p. 135.

<sup>16</sup> This is based on Elinor Lipper's estimate of 30,000 in Butyrka. Elinor Lipper, *Eleven Years in Soviet Prison Camps*, London 1951, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 700.

<sup>18</sup> Conquest, 'Forced Labour Statistics', pp. 436-7.

<sup>19</sup> Elinor Lipper, *op. cit.* Back cover—'List of my prisons and camps 1937-1947', indicates the she was in prison for a year and three months before being transferred to Vladivostok for transportation to Kolyma.

<sup>20</sup> Evgenia S. Ginzburg, *Into the Whirlwind*, Harmondsworth 1968, pp. 39, 135, 142, 149, 153, 218, 263, indicates that she was in prison for about 2½ years before she began her journey to Kolyma.

<sup>21</sup> Conquest, 'Forced Labour Statistics', p. 435.

<sup>22</sup> 43,000 new full members and 40,000 new candidate members. (D. Bakhshiev, *Partiinoe stroitelstvo v usloviyakh pobedy sotsializma v SSSR*, 1954, p. 65).

<sup>23</sup> For sources and a more detailed breakdown of changes in party membership during this period see Appendix 1. These other losses also covered 'dead souls' and the double counting of party members.

<sup>24</sup> John Arch Getty has recently produced an interesting account of how these party purging operations were carried out, which also emphasises the need to distinguish clearly between, on the one hand, the procedure for cleansing the party of careerists, incompetents and 'balast' and, on the other, the police activities mainly stemming from the trials. It is only the latter which should rightfully be known as 'the terror'. (See John Arch Getty, *The 'Great Purges' reconsidered: The Soviet Communist Party, 1933-1939*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Boston College, 1979).

<sup>25</sup> See Conquest, *Kolyma*, p. 220.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 226-7.

<sup>27</sup> See Dallin and Nicolaevsky, *Forced Labour in Soviet Russia*, London, 1948, p. 137.

<sup>28</sup> i.e.  $10 \times (6,000-9,000) \times (12-15)$ .

<sup>29</sup> Dallin and Nicolaevsky, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

<sup>30</sup> I know that Japanese intelligence were interested in what was happening in the port of Nagayev, because they informed British Naval Intelligence after they had lost several agents who landed there disguised as fishermen. The British subsequently informed US Naval Intelligence and hence we have a record of this (see NARS, RG 861, 156/19). But the Japanese must have been monitoring the level of Soviet shipping through the Straits of La Perouse before 1941 and there should be some coastguards' reports or Naval intelligence reports on its size.

<sup>31</sup> R. Conquest, 'Forced Labour Statistics', p. 438.

<sup>32</sup> A. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago: Two*, Fontana 1976, p. 372.

<sup>33</sup> Elinor Lipper stated, 'It was estimated that Garanin had the deaths of some 26,000 persons on his conscience'. (E. Lipper, *op. cit.*, p. 10). However, this probably referred to total deaths under Garanin and not just to executions.

<sup>34</sup> A. Solzhenitsyn, *op. cit.*, pp. 373-4 indicates over 1,000 executions. D. J. Dallin and B. Nicolaevsky, *op. cit.*, p. 260, state that 3,000 'Trotskyites' were executed.

<sup>35</sup> 'One must point out that the prison authorities often suggested to and even asked many of the condemned prisoners to sign appeals for commutation: and when prisoners objected strongly and refused, not wanting any more 'deals', they signed appeals in the prisoners' names. And at the very least it took months for the papers to move through the twists and turns of the machine'. A. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago: One*, Fontana 1974, p. 446. (Emphasis in the original). And later, 'They probably had to shoot at least half of those condemned to death', *ibid.*, p. 454.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 447.

<sup>37</sup> Conquest, 'Forced Labour Statistics', p. 438.

<sup>38</sup> Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 712.

<sup>39</sup> This is mid-way between the decline for the 1905-09 and the 1895-1900 born cohorts.

<sup>40</sup> Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 710.

<sup>41</sup> Rosefelde, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* Footnote 34, p. 80.

<sup>43</sup> S. G. Wheatcroft, *op. cit.* Footnote 52, p. 293.

<sup>44</sup> See NARS, State Department files 800, 131/80 (March 7, 1936) and 800, 131/139 (May 18, 1937).

<sup>45</sup> The Embassy official who had prepared a brief for this reply (Loy W. Henderson, Chargé d'Affaires ad interim) had been a little less cautious and had stated that 'the number of convicts is commonly supposed to run into millions' (see NARS, State Dept files 800.131/139, p. 2). But this had been corrected in the State Department back in Washington. Elsewhere in the despatch Henderson stated, quite bluntly, 'The number of convicts is unknown'.

<sup>46</sup> See NARS, WDGS (10), OIR Report No. 4675, 1, 11 June 1948, pp. 6, 7, 24.

<sup>47</sup> This was published as *Forced Labor in the Soviet Union*, Washington, 1957.

<sup>48</sup> NARS, Dept of State Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Report No. 8353, *Current Penal Policy in the USSR*, October 3, 1960, p. 2. This report was classified 'secret' at the time. Although access to most secret materials is restricted for 25 years, this report has been de-classified through the Freedom of Information Act.

## APPENDIX 1

AVAILABLE DATA ON CHANGES IN PARTY MEMBERSHIP JANUARY 1933-39  
(in thousands)

## The Party Purge, June 1933-May 1935

	<i>Full Membership</i>	<i>Candidate Membership</i>	<i>All Membership</i>
1. January 1933	2,204	1,351	3,555
2. Expelled	-313	-300	-613
3. Transferred to candidate status	-169	+169	—
4. Transferred to sympathiser status	-33	-223	-256
5. New recruits	0	0	0
6. Remaining, excluding other losses	1,689	997	2,687
7. Estimated May 1935	1,575	643	2,218
8. Other losses (including drop-outs, deaths and double recordings)	-115	-354	-469

## Verification of party documents, 13 May 1935-April 1936

9. May 1935 (est.)	1,575	643	2,218
10. Expelled	?	?	-261
11. Restored	?	?	+168
12. Remaining, excluding other losses	?	?	2,214
13. April 1936 (est.)	1,472	557	2,029
14. Other losses			-95

## Exchange of party documents, April-September 1936

15. January 1936	1,490	587	2,077
16. January 1937	1,454	528	1,982
17. Difference	-36	-59	-95
18. Expelled, restored	?	?	?

## November 1936-January 1938

19. January 1937	1,454	527	1,982
20. New recruits	+43	+40	+83
21. Expelled	?	?	-108
22. Restored	?	?	+46
23. Remaining, excluding other losses	?	?	2,002
24. January 1938	1,406	514	1,920
25. Other losses	?	?	-82

## January 1938-January 1939

26. January 1938	1,406	514	1,920
27. New recruits			
1st half-year	+39	+101	+140
2nd half-year	?	?	?
28. Expelled	?	?	-81
Restored	?	?	?
29. Remaining, excluding 2nd half-year intake, restored and other losses	?	?	1,979
30. January 1939	1,514	793	2,307
31. 2nd half-year intake plus restored minus other losses	?	?	328

## APPENDIX 1 (continued)

## Sources:

- (1), (15), (16), (19), (24), (26), (30) from 'KPSS v tsifrah', *Partiinaya Zhizn*, No. 19. 1967, p. 9.  
 (2), (3), (4) from N. A. Zolotarev, *Vazhnyi etap organizatsionnogo ukrepleniya kommunisticheskoi partii (1928-1937gg)*, 1979, p. 172. The figure of 312.8 thousand expelled party members was also given by I. N. Yudin, *Sotsialisticheskaya baza rosti KPSS*, 1972, p. 126, however, he stated that this was from a full membership of 1,916.5 thousand (presumably the 1933-35 average membership).  
 (5) New recruits. No new recruits were admitted from the beginning of the purge in June 1933 to November 1936.  
 (6) This is the result of subtracting (2-5) from (1).  
 (7) and (9). This is estimated from the January 1935 and January 1936 figures as given in source (1) above.  
 (8) This is the result of subtracting (7) from (6).  
 (10) From N. A. Zolotarev, *ibid.*, p. 174.  
 (11) From N. A. Zolotarev, *ibid.*, p. 178.  
 (12) This is the result of subtracting (10) and adding (11) to (9).  
 (13) This is estimated from the January 1936 and January 1937 figures as given in source (1) above.  
 (14) This is the result of subtracting (13) from (12).  
 (17) This is the result of subtracting (16) from (15).  
 (20), (22) and (27) From D. Bakhshiev, *Partiinoe stroitelstvo v usloviyakh pobedy sotsializma v SSSR*, 1954, p. 65.  
 (21) and (28) From N. A. Zolotarev, *ibid.*, p. 181.  
 (23) This is the result of adding (20) and (22) to (19) and subtracting (21).  
 (25) This is the result of subtracting (24) from (23).  
 (29) This is the result of adding (27) to (26) and subtracting (28).  
 (31) This is the result of subtracting (29) from (30).

## APPENDIX 2

U.S. Dept of State, Intelligence and Research Bureau, estimates of Soviet forced labour (*Current penal policy in the USSR*, Intelligence Report No. 8353, October 3, 1960, pp. 2-4).

(a) The maximum series of figures was based on an unnamed 1958 study of employment distribution and some official Soviet statements. It enabled the following detailed estimates to be made:

	Number of prisoners working on MVD projects or not working	Number of prisoners contracted out to Economic Ministries	Total
1952	1.8	3.0	4.8
1953	1.6	3.0	4.6
1954	1.0	2.5	3.5
1955	0.8	2.2	3.0
1956	0.5	1.7	2.2

(b) The minimum figure is that given by P. I. Kudryavtsev (the Soviet Deputy Prosecutor-General) when interviewed by the Harvard Professor, H. J. Berman, in May 1957. Kudryavtsev is reported to have intimated to Berman that in March 1953 there had been about 3 million persons in detention of whom almost half were political prisoners and, by May 1957, the total of prisoners in detention had been reduced to 800,000-900,000, of whom about 18,000, or less than 2%, were political prisoners.



(c) The disenfranchised residual figures were calculated in the following way. The 1959 census returns were used to compute the numbers of people old enough to vote. These were compared with the numbers reported to be eligible to vote. The difference would comprise (i) those classified insane and those criminals deprived of voting rights by the courts (of whom the bureau estimated there were between 0.5 and 1.0 million) and (ii) persons in corrective labour colonies. The figures as presented in the report are as follows:

Estimates of prison population in the USSR based on disenfranchised population

Year	<i>Computed population aged 18+</i>	<i>Reported population eligible to vote</i>	<i>Total debarred from voting</i>	<i>Residual non-voters after deduction of 0.5-1.0 million</i>
1951	117,800	113,050	4,750	3.75-4.25
1954	124,100	120,751	3,349	2.35-2.85
1959	138,400	136,416	1,984	0.98-1.48

Downloaded by [University of Montana] at 11:33 06 April 2015