

A Further Note of Clarification on the Famine, the Camps and Excess Mortality

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FORTUNATELY SCHOLARS SELDOM HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT SEEING their unpublished work extensively cited in the publications of others. There is a convention that you do not plunder other people's unpublished conference papers without their consent. Steven Rosefielde¹ does not follow such conventions, and his action in this case is particularly annoying because (i) he appears not to understand the material that he is attempting to use, and (ii) his objective is self-serving mystification. Rosefielde is clearly attempting to substantiate his former claims concerning the scale of excess mortality and forced labour, and to cast doubt on the Soviet archival materials that challenge these views. The one previous claim that Rosefielde is now prepared to reject concerns the Antonov–Ovseenko figure of 156 million for the 1937 census, which he now not only rejects but also implicitly denies that he had previously been its most outspoken champion.

As regards the reliability of the NKVD materials, Rosefielde notes Walter Laqueur's criticisms with approval and repeats Laqueur's claim that the KGB and military archives remain completely closed, as do most of the NKVD records except for those 'suspiciously available' in GARF. Both of these statements are simply incorrect, as will be shown below.

While the KGB archives are not totally open, they are certainly not completely closed. The OGPU materials for the countryside during collectivisation and the famine are being worked on by Professor Danilov's group prior to publication in five volumes, with a summary volume in English for Yale University Press. The materials on repression, arrests and executions have been made available to the former dissident Arsenii Roginsky of Memorial, and although it is regrettable that he, unlike Danilov, has not made these materials available to international scholarly gaze, he is adamant that his figures correspond to the published series. We also have regional OGPU materials that correspond to these series.

Secondly, while the nature of the split of NKVD materials between GARF and TsAFSB is curious, it cannot be described as suspicious in the terms that Rosefielde and Laqueur want to imply. The division of NKVD materials was apparently decided in 1960 when the functions of the MVD were greatly reduced. The labour camps and places of special exile were taken out of its jurisdiction, and so it was quite natural that the files for these matters would be taken from the KGB and placed in the secret

section of the MVD archive in GARF. What seems to me to be curious is that the MVD *osoby papki* prepared for Stalin, Molotov, Beria and Khrushchev were at this time split, with the pre-1984 materials remaining in the KGB archives and the post-1944 materials being transferred to the secret MVD archive in GARF. What lay behind that particular split I do not know, but it is clear that it had nothing to do with attempts to fool Western historians 36 years later. What could be considered suspicious is not the location of the NKVD Gulag and *spets-pereselentsev* files in the Secret section of GARF, but rather the decisions to give access to these materials at certain dates to certain people and not to others. We know for instance that Zemskov got access to these NKVD Gulag and *spets-pereselentsev* materials several years before anyone else, but that appears to have been because he was working on a related research topic. Subsequent examination of the materials in the archive shows that Zemskov's citing of the materials was more or less correct. We now have Roginsky's word that the detailed materials in the KGB archives confirm the series of data previously supplied by Dugin, Popov and others. I repeat that while we may consider the privileged access of some individuals to the material to be suspicious, the data themselves are not suspicious.

If Laqueur and Rosefielde were ever to get around to looking at the materials that are now readily available in the archives, their views on the reliability of these materials would become more credible. But for the moment they are making pronouncements on things that they know little about and the academic community should treat them appropriately.

Rosefielde claims (p. 969) to present a proof that these data are internally inconsistent. He attempts to prove this by using a series of juggling tricks in which he multiplies and divides part of these data to show that something does not add up. I will not bother to take readers through this curious exercise, because it is unnecessary; the simple reason why the figures do not add up is that Rosefielde appears to be unaware that the arrest figures that he is citing refer not to all arrests but simply to those arrested on political charges under articles of the criminal code specifically concerned with political and counter-revolutionary crimes, and that they exclude all the common criminal charges. Elsewhere I have argued that many of the so-called common criminal charges would in our eyes be considered political; this applies to speculation and theft of socialist property like grain that has been grown by yourself and that is standing in the *kolkhoz* fields.

Not surprisingly, when Rosefielde adds these figures up for 17 years and then divides by 17, he manages to prove that the camps held more people than were simply arrested for political offences, in fact almost twice as many. But this does not, as Rosefielde claims, invalidate the claims of Getty, Rittersporn, Zemskov and Wheatcroft concerning the reliability of the NKVD materials; it only validates the claim that Rosefielde does not know what he is doing.

We then move on to Rosefielde's treatment of the demographic data. Here we see a totally different Rosefielde, one who, we are informed, 'originally cautioned' that the Antonov-Ovseenko data were wrong. And one who now claims that the mortality registration data for 1933 'permit a direct and simple computation of famine victims merely by subtracting deaths which would have occurred if the mortality rate had been the same as 1932 from deaths actually reported'. Although Rosefielde graciously

attributes the latter calculation to me, and appears to approve of it, I think that he goes much too far and that it was not at all as simple as that. We still have to reallocate the residual discrepancy that we get when registration data are compared with the censuses. Rosefielde wants to keep this residual to allocate it to his other 'homicides' (i.e. 'collectivisation, prison executions, Gulag camp killings, prison and colony premature deaths and deaths of exiles'). But this claim of absolute reliability for the registration data cannot be maintained. There was undoubtedly some under-reporting taking place and although I would not want to allocate all the residual to 1933, some will certainly need to go there. Hence I tend to favour less absolutist statements. The registered mortality data provide a vivid indication of the scale and chronology of the famine, but they do not allow a direct and simple computation of it.

One of the curious features of Rosefielde's article is the use of the words 'killings' and 'homicides'. Readers of my revised conference paper published in this journal² two issues after Rosefielde published many of the tables for my earlier draft will note the emphasis that I place on the distinction between conscious killing and deaths as a result of criminal neglect. Unfortunately this is an aspect of my paper that Rosefielde completely ignored. His shift from the concepts of excess mortality and population deficit to the politically charged concept of 'Stalinist homicides' is perhaps the grossest of the crudities that Rosefielde is using to obfuscate the main issues.

I would like to state publicly that I did not give Rosefielde permission to cite my unpublished conference papers, and that I do not approve of the manner in which he uses these data. Rosefielde misuses and misunderstands the NKVD data which convincingly demonstrate that Rosefielde grossly exaggerated the scale of labour camps and labour camp mortality in Stalin's Russia. He is extremely slippery in denying his own responsibility for trying to foist the Antonov-Ovseenko 1937 census figure onto the academic community. He is mistaken in suggesting that the famine registration data provide a simple and direct count of famine losses. He is further mistaken in suggesting that this indicator can be meaningfully deducted from the residual population deficit that arises from deducting registered population growth (births minus deaths) from the population growth recorded in the censuses, in order to calculate a meaningful level of excess mortality. And worst of all, his relabelling of this population deficit as 'Stalinist homicide' is misleading and presumably a crude attempt to raise emotions and move away from rational explanation.

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¹ Steven Rosefielde, 'Stalinism in Post-Communist Perspective: New Evidence on Killings, Forced Labour and Economic Growth in the 1930s', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 48, 6, September 1996, pp. 959-987.

² Stephen G. Wheatcroft, 'The Scale and Nature of German and Soviet Repression and Mass Killings, 1930-1945', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 48, 8, December 1996, pp. 1319-1353.