

***Glasnost'* and the Gulag: New Information on Soviet Forced Labour around World War II**

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IN THE PAST THREE YEARS new information has been revealed by Russian scholars with regard to the Gulag system of forced labour. These data from the state archives concern the population of the Gulag, the demographic make-up of the inmates, conditions within the camps and the contribution of the Gulag to the economy of the USSR.

For decades, debate about the population of the Soviet forced labour camps has proved inconclusive, and wide-ranging estimates have been offered (Table 1). Such estimates were often treated as suspect by those of differing political views; the assumption being that, so far as Gulag population figures were concerned, the hawk went high and the dove low. The end of the USSR is perhaps, therefore, an appropriate moment for the Soviet camp system to be firmly placed in the historical rather than the political sphere of discussion.

Such is the theory, and newly released archival figures would appear to provide an opportunity for a clean break from the debates of the past. In practice, however, the new figures do not carry the requisite air of finality, nor do those revealing them take a stance of sufficient political disinterest. The figures cited by the core source group¹ for camp population are substantially lower than the estimates commonly found in both Western and Soviet works, and the articles revealing these new figures do not fail to emphasise this point. Without mentioning the decades of secrecy which necessitated these estimates, those with access to the archives unfailingly criticise the higher figures previously estimated. On further investigation, though, it is apparent that the recently revealed data themselves leave much still unresolved. Now is not yet the time to declare the controversy closed.

*Definitions*²

The release of the new information considered in this paper has in one sense actually served to erect a barrier to assessing the size of the Gulag. Previous debates referred to 'forced labour', 'the Gulag' and 'the camps' almost interchangeably, whereas now the precise terminology of an archival revelation is crucial, and sometimes confusing.

When the information of the core source group was first released, a table of

TABLE 1
ESTIMATES OF THE GULAG POPULATION AROUND THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

<i>Gulag population</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Methodology</i>
2.3 million (December 1937)	N. S. Timasheff, <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> , 54, 1948, pp. 148–155	Calculation of disenfranchised population
Up to 3.5 million (1941)	Naum Jasny, <i>Journal of Political Economy</i> , 59, 5, 1951, pp. 405–419	NKVD production figures in 1941 plan
4–5 million (1939)	Stephen G. Wheatcroft, <i>Soviet Studies</i> , 33, 2, 1981, p. 286	Evaluation of census and employment data
5.5–9.5 million (end 1938)	Robert Conquest, <i>Soviet Studies</i> , 43, 5, 1991, p. 951	NKVD figures to 1937 Census Board, with subsequent arrest and death estimates
9.6 million (June 1941)	Unpublished German pre-war estimates, in Dallin & Nicolaevsky, <i>Forced Labour in Soviet Russia</i> (London, 1948), p. 86	Reports of German economists from visits to the USSR after the 1939 Pact was signed
10.6 million (1941)	Steven Rosefielde, <i>Soviet Studies</i> , 33, 1, 1981, p. 65	Based on Mora & Zwiernak, and annual mortality
12–14 million (1940–41)	Colonel Andreev, cited in Swianiewicz, p. 29	Based on personal experience as camp guard inspector
15 million (1940–42)	Mora & Zwiernak, in Dallin & Nikolaevsky, <i>Forced Labour in Soviet Russia</i> (London, 1948), p. 62	Calculated from reports of former prisoners
20 million (wartime)	Victor Kravchenko, <i>I Chose Freedom</i> (London, 1947), p. 406	Based on estimates current during work as a Sovnarkom head of department

remarkably low figures was given for the camp population.³ For example, around 1.5 million was the number given for camp inmates at the beginning and end of 1941, whereas even the lowest Western estimate was more than double this figure, and most others were significantly higher. Subsequently, a new set of figures was released by the core source group, which were, for many of the years cited, around twice as large as their previous camp figures.⁴ The explanation revealed was that this second set of figures referred to Gulag camps *and colonies*. The distinction between the two categories is that those of 'less social danger', i.e. with sentences less than three years in length, went into colonies rather than camps. Whether there was in fact any substantive difference for the inmates within the camps or colonies goes unmentioned.

In this case then, the distinction is a fairly straightforward one. Greater difficulties are apparent, however, in establishing the distinctions involved in the various categories of exiles and settlers. The key question is whether any of these

TABLE 2
NUMBER OF PRISONERS IN GULAG CORRECTIVE LABOUR CAMPS AND COLONIES
(ON 1 JANUARY EACH YEAR)

Year	In corrective labour camps	In corrective labour colonies	% in camps	% in colonies	Total
1934	510 307	—	—	—	510 307
1935	725 483	240 259	75	25	965 742
1936	839 406	457 088	65	35	1 296 494
1937	820 881	375 488	69	31	1 196 369
1938	996 367	885 203	53	47	1 881 570
1939	1 317 195	355 243	79	21	1 672 438
1940	1 344 408	315 584	81	19	1 659 992
1941	1 500 524	429 205	78	22	1 929 729
1942	1 415 596	361 447	80	20	1 777 043
1943	983 974	500 208	66	34	1 484 182
1944	663 594	516 225	56	44	1 179 819
1945	715 506	745 171	49	51	1 460 677
1946	600 897 ^a	956 224	39	61	1 703 095
1947	808 839	912 704	47	53	1 721 543
1948	1 108 057	1 091 478	50	50	2 199 535
1949	1 216 361	1 140 324	52	48	2 356 685
1950	1 416 300	1 145 051	55	45	2 561 351
1951	1 533 767	994 379	61	39	2 528 146
1952	1 711 202	793 312	68	32	2 504 514
1953	1 727 970	740 554	70	30	2 468 524

Sources: A. N. Dugin, 'Gulag: Otkryvaya arkhivy', *Na boevom postu* (Moscow), 27 December 1989, pp. 3–4; A. N. Dugin, 'Stalinizm: legendy i fakty', *Slovo* (Moscow), 7, 1990, p. 23.

^a In an otherwise identical later table of camp population figures, Zemskov gave a figure of 746 871 for 1946. This would result in a camp/colony ratio of 44/56 (Zemskov, *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, 6, 1991).

categories should be termed part of the Gulag and therefore added to the totals already shown in Table 2.

In discussing the 1939 census, Nove talks of *spetsposelentsy* (special settlers) as being behind wire.⁵ Zemskov, however, introduces the term *trudposelentsy* (labour settlers).⁶ He distinguishes *trudposelentsy* from *zaklyuchennyye* (prisoners), and yet refers to them living in a 'zone of labour settlements of the NKVD Gulag'. According to Zemskov, the terms *spetsposelentsy* and *trudposelentsy* are synonymous. Therefore, in referring to settlers being behind wire, Nove is dealing with the same group of people as that which Zemskov distinguishes from prisoners.

Despite Zemskov's distinction between settler and prisoner, some boundary to the zone must have been defined. Settlements of this sort often were enclosed by a fence, and the fact that the settlements were under the title Gulag, an acronym from the phrase Main Camp Administration, would seem to justify the inclusion of this further category in the total Gulag population figures. The lack of a complete series of figures for labour settlers precludes such a revision for the entire period covered by Table 2. However, new figures are available for 1932–40 and 1949 (Table 3). These show that the population of the labour settlements for the years available was on average 75% of that of the camps and colonies total.

TABLE 3
POPULATION OF THE GULAG LABOUR SETTLEMENTS
(ON 1 JANUARY EACH YEAR)

Year	Population of labour settlements	% of labour settlement population to camp and colony total. ^a
1932	1 317 022	—
1933	1 142 084	—
1934	1 072 546	—
1935	973 693	101
1936	1 017 133	79
1937	916 787	77
1938	877 651	47
1939	938 552	56
1940	997 513	60
1949	2 300 223	98

Source: V. N. Zemskov, 'Spetsposelentsy—po dokumentatsii NKVD-MVD SSSR', *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, 11, 1990, pp. 6 and 10.

^a From Table 2.

A final consideration with regard to the question of definitions concerns the *spetskontingent* of the NKVD. Not only has there been some debate about the definition of this term, but it also changed its meaning during wartime.

Before the war, the *spetskontingent* of the NKVD was a term used to define a category of the population in the compilation of the census. According to Polyakov *et al.*, the *spetskontingent* was made up of NKVD staff, prisoners in camps, colonies, prisons, and 'arrest accommodation', and labour settlers in the zone of the Gulag.⁷ Aside from this application of the term as a census category, it also appears that the part of a branch workforce not included in the employment statistics, that is, forced labour within a branch, were referred to as the NKVD *spetskontingent*.

In the war period, however, the meaning of the term was altered.⁸ During the final stages of the war particularly, many Soviet citizens liberated from German control by the Red Army were sent to 'verification and filtration camps'. Servicemen who had fallen into enemy hands, civil officials in occupied areas, and males of call-up age in these territories all formed part of what then became termed the *spetskontingent*. Those imprisoned in these special camps do not appear in the statistics cited for Gulag population, and yet they still contributed to the war effort, and at the end of the war some 160 969 men designated *spetskontingent* were working for various industrial *narkomaty*.⁹

Internal discrepancies

The fact that the amount of information being released from the archives is rapidly growing increasingly facilitates comparative assessments of data from the

core source group. The new numbers for the population of the Gulag camps and colonies, quoted across the various articles which have revealed this archive material, are in agreement with each other, except for a couple of cases. The first of these is the changing figure for the camp population of 1946 (Table 2) quoted by Zemskov in different articles. In the broad sweep of necessarily impersonal enumeration, the precise number of camp inmates on 1 January 1946 is not a crucial statistic, and the very fact that Zemskov himself corrected the first figure to that quoted elsewhere suggests a one-off error rather than an indication of inherent unreliability.¹⁰

The articles by Dugin also cloud the issue a little by the introduction of several footnotes to the Gulag population table not present in Zemskov's presentation. The colony population for 1935 has a note saying 'only in prisons', for 1936 the same column refers to 'prisons and colonies', and for 1939 and 1941 a note is deemed necessary to point out that the figures are 'only [those] in colonies'. This column is supposed to reveal the number of prisoners in the Gulag colonies on 1 January each year. If particular notes are required to state where a figure refers to prisons only, colonies only, and prisons and colonies together, then the question remains as to what information is to be inferred from the unannotated figures which make up the bulk of the data. The only solution appears to be to ignore these footnotes. Such difficulties are annoying, and only serve to confuse still further the vital issue of definitions, explored above, upon which hangs much of the value of the new data.

Despite the difficulties outlined above, the central table of labour camp population statistics is fairly consistent between the articles of the core source group. Certainly, this is the case in comparison with some of the more detailed information, which brings to light far wider discrepancies in both fact and interpretation. Both Zemskov and Dugin, for example, present prison population figures cited as from the Central State Archive of the October Revolution (TsGAOR).¹¹ The average monthly total of prison inmates as given by these scholars differs by as much as 40 000, with no discernible pattern to the discrepancies.¹² Differences also exist between the figures given by the two scholars for releases from the Gulag camps.¹³ Although these latter differences are negligible in overall quantitative terms, they are from the same stated source and so the divergence perhaps demands some clarification.

In addition to these factual discrepancies, differing interpretations of the newly released data also raise questions. Dugin's work is an example of the more traditional style of conservative Soviet writing rather than the more revisionist stance brought into vogue under Gorbachev. To the critical observer, therefore, Dugin's articles may appear somewhat unscholarly, in both their highly polemical style and their use of the source data. In one such example he strongly criticises 'publicists' and makes much of the need for historians to deal in solid facts.¹⁴ He then proceeds to use the available data in a rather selective manner, accompanied by the apparent intention of outdoing any publicist in terms of polemical cant.

Dugin works out the total number of people to have passed through the Gulag camps by taking the population at the beginning and end of a year (as given in Table 2) and, having thus found the numerical increase, adding to this the number

TABLE 4
NUMBER OF PRISONERS IN USSR PRISONS (MONTHLY MEAN)

Year	January	May	September	December	Average of monthly totals ^a
1939	350 538	225 242	178 258	186 278	235 000
1940	190 266	196 028	401 146	434 871	273 000
1941	487 739	332 936	229 217	247 404	325 000
1942	277 992	262 464	201 547	221 669	247 000
1943	235 313	248 778	170 767	151 708	207 000
1944	155 213	191 309	267 885	272 486	214 000
1945	279 969	269 526	191 930	235 092	252 000
1946	261 500	268 117	259 078	290 984	269 000
1947	306 163	326 369	349 035	284 642	325 000
1948	275 850	239 612	228 258	230 614	243 000

Source: V. N. Zemskov, 'Zaklyuchennyye, spetsposelentsy, ssyl'noposelentsy, ssyl'nye i vyslannyye', *Istoriya SSSR*, 5, 1991, p. 153. Final column calculated by the author.

^a Dugin, 'Govoryat arkhivy', p. 99, presents a table of average monthly prison population which differs from Zemskov's figures. Dugin's alternatives are 1939—225 493; 1940—274 347; 1941—301 988; 1942—244 994; 1943—204 737; 1944—219 281; 1945—Dugin says the data for this year are incomplete; 1946—290 984; 1947—284 642; 1948—230 614.

released each year to get, he claims, the number of new inmates entering the camps each year.¹⁵

The methodological faults inherent in such a calculation are startling. First, as he is apparently using the same archive as Zemskov, Dugin has no need to *calculate* the annual inflow, as it is already recorded in the archival information.¹⁶ Secondly, if a calculation was needed, perhaps to check the archival data, it would involve the addition of not only those released from the camps, but also of the annual total removed from the camps by other means, such as death, escape and transfer to prisons. Between 1937 and 1947 those no longer making up part of the camp population for these reasons accounted for, on average, a number equal to at least half of those who were released per annum. It is extraordinary that Dugin chose to ignore such figures in his work, especially as they make up the bulk of a short article in *Argumenty i fakty* which he cites in the same passage.¹⁷

Using the method outlined above, Dugin calculates that, between 1937 and 1950, 8 803 178 inmates had been in the camps. Within a few paragraphs, however, he states that by 1950 only 5.6–5.8 million had been in the camps, and then, seven lines later, he asserts that 11.8 million had been through the camps!¹⁸ Such confusion is cleared up a little in another Dugin article, which is largely word for word the same but, in this crucial passage, replaces the 5.6–5.8 million with the 8.8 million previously calculated and states that the 11.8 million figure refers to the period 1934–53.¹⁹

Dugin's contribution to the academic debate on the Gulag may prove off-putting to the observer seeking to ascertain the credibility of the material with which he deals. The fact that he is one of the few scholars so far to have had access to this newly revealed archive material raises uncomfortable questions as to

whether the polemical presentation of a conservative figure for camp inmates is more important to those within the archives than the 'scientific and historical discipline . . . [of] source study', which Dugin so lauds in theory.²⁰

Wider discrepancies

Obviously one of the first questions to be addressed with regard to the newly published archival material on the size of the Gulag population is whether or not it is genuine. The statistics summarised in Table 2 are from documents found in the Central State Archive of the October Revolution.²¹ It has been charged by A. V. Antonov-Ovseenko, whose own estimates of prison and camp inmates in 1938 stand at some 16 million, that these documents are false and untrustworthy.²² Such a charge, however, is vigorously refuted by Zemskov, the Soviet academic at the forefront of the current spate of archival revelations. He argues that it would be impossible for whole archive collections to be falsified, otherwise each camp would have been required to have two administrative offices, one producing genuine records, and one false. This argument is based on the view that the central authorities must have had a correct record of the manpower available to them in the labour camps, and Zemskov notes that the figures which he reveals coincide with the evidence of documents signed by Ezhov, Beria and Stalin.²³

Though not actually impossible, it is indeed unlikely that a series of figures worked out down to the last *zek* has been forged. However, to acknowledge the probability of archival documents being genuine is not yet to accept that the figures therein tell the entire story. There exist other equally valid data in the archives against which to check the Gulag population figures.

The results of the 1937 census in the Soviet Union provide a separate point of reference for evaluating forced labour statistics. These results were suppressed at the time, along with their compilers, as a population growth of the magnitude predicted failed to materialise. Subsequently, a false, but more politically correct, population figure was announced in the 1939 census. In recent years, however, some of the data from the 1937 census have been brought out of the Central State Archive of the National Economy.

According to an article by the archive director, Tsaplin, the final population figure arrived at in January 1937 was 162 003 225. The census authorities, in reporting this finding to their political masters, noted that this figure was the total 'including the Red Army and NKVD contingents'.²⁴ Also enumerated though was the size of the population excluding *voennosluzhashchie*, a total of 156.9 million people.²⁵ Tsaplin's reading of the archival information leads him to state that the term *voennosluzhashchie* covered the Red Army and the camp guards, together totalling about two million in 1937, leaving 3.1 million remaining to reach the total population 'including the Red Army and NKVD contingents'. He then says that the most feasible explanation is that these three million plus unexplained people were the number 'in places of imprisonment'. If the prison population on 1 February 1937 was 545 000,²⁶ then that would leave around two and a half million in other places of imprisonment, i.e. in Gulag camps and colonies—a figure over twice the size of the 1.2 million cited by the core source group for this date.

The calculation of the Gulag size by the above method is not the only alternative offered by the archive revelations. Also revealed was a precise figure of 2 653 036, compiled for inclusion in the census, as the size of the 'special contingent of the NKVD' at the end of January 1937.²⁷ Wheatcroft, commenting on the Tsaplin article, states that this *spetskонтингент* includes 'labour camp inmates, labour colony inmates, exiles, special migrants, labour camp guards, etc'.²⁸ This seems to be a misreading of the source, as Tsaplin, in building up the census figures from the 156.9 million excluding *voennosluzhashchie*, adds this *spetskонтингент* total to his two million *voennosluzhashchie*, which, he states, already includes the labour camp guard figures.

With regard to the key question of the NKVD special contingent, Polyakov, Zhiromskaya and Kiselev base their definition on instructions issued during the 1939 census.²⁹ According to these, the *spetskонтингент* was divided into three groups. Group A was, broadly, the NKVD border guards and internal troops, plus auxiliary staff. Group B consisted predominately of the Gulag staff, and group C was the number detained by the NKVD in camps, colonies, prisons and Gulag labour settlements. A series of detailed figures for regions and republics is given, which gives a total all-union figure for groups B and C of 2 389 570 in 1937, and an approximation of 270 730 for group A.³⁰ These figures together add up to just over Tsaplin's total of 2 653 036. However, Polyakov *et al.* include a far wider group of people than Tsaplin, who counts the NKVD guards elsewhere, as *voennosluzhashchie*. Furthermore, Polyakov *et al.* estimate that up to 25% of the groups B and C total of 2 389 570 was made up of NKVD guards, leaving an estimate as low as 1.8 million for the inmates of 'camps, prisons and labour settlements' in January 1937.³¹ Zemskov argues that the guard contingent made up only 6% of the total for groups B and C, leaving over 2.2 million inmates.³²

Zemskov also negates the conclusion of Polyakov *et al.* still further by showing that by no means all of the labour-settlement population was included in the *spetskонтингент* category of the 1937 census. He identifies the 2 389 570 NKVD *spetskонтингент* in 1937 as including all prisoners in camps, colonies and prisons, but only a proportion of those people living within the Gulag labour settlement zones. His population table of prisons, camps, colonies and Gulag labour settlement zones for 1937 gives a total of 2 658 156.³³ Therefore, Zemskov argues, a significant proportion of labour settlers were not included in the *spetskонтингент* in 1937, because they had been counted as ordinary free people with the full rights of citizens 'in accordance with the Constitution of the USSR adopted on 5 December 1936'.³⁴

In fact, the constitution in question makes no reference to forced labour. Furthermore, the description of the period as being, in Zemskov's words, 'a peak of liberalisation of the labour exile regime', and therefore conducive to the favourable reclassification of *trudposeletsy*, is scarcely a universally held opinion.³⁵ Others would assert, along with Unger, that, 'the coincidence in time between the adoption of the constitution and the terror of the so-called Great Purge is too striking to go unmentioned'.³⁶ Zemskov's explanations also fail to clarify why, by his reckoning, over half of the settlers were in fact included in the *spetskонтингент*. Such an apparently arbitrary splitting of the same category of

people into NKVD chattels and citizens with full rights seems a highly unlikely procedure for the census compilers to accept.

Working from the same archives, often down to the last page, therefore, differing conclusions about the exact size and make-up of the NKVD *spetskонтингент* have been reached. Despite their differing final totals, Polyakov *et al.* and Zemskov agree that camp guards were included within the *spetskонтингент*. Tsaplin, on the other hand, states that the *voennosluzhashchie* total of two million referred to Red Army personnel and the camp guards. This is neither confirmed nor refuted by the figure for the Red Army alone in 1937 given by Polyakov *et al.* of 1 682 569.³⁷

One way to tidy up this anomaly would be to accept that Tsaplin mistook border guards for camp guards, as Polyakov and his co-authors refer also to a population total document which states that it includes the Red Army and NKVD *border guards*. It must be stressed, however, that to attribute an error in source reading to Tsaplin is mere conjecture aimed at squaring apparent discrepancies in the archival material. Equally, to accept both Tsaplin's joint Red-Army-plus-camp-guards total of about two million and the Red Army total of 1 682 569 would leave around 300 000 camp guards;³⁸ a figure which fits in perfectly well with other estimates of camp guard numbers.³⁹

Clearly, the release of the new series of camp population figures is not yet going to end debate, as the opening up of the archives has brought forth other information of an apparently incompatible nature. The range of figures possible for January 1937 is, in comparison with the options presented in Table 1, within a reasonably narrow band. Yet, even from this comparatively low position in 1937, Conquest argues for an upper limit of prisoners at around five to eight million by 1939, depending on the numbers shot in the intervening period, whilst Zemskov's corresponding figure is around 1.7 million.⁴⁰

Fluctuations

The figures for the number of Gulag prisoners at the beginning of each year do not always give the complete picture, and this is particularly the case when considering the war period. It is interesting to note that the number of camps is no reliable guide to the number of prisoners. In March 1941 there were 53 camps and 425 colonies in the Gulag system, and in December 1944 there were the same number of camps and 50 more colonies,⁴¹ despite a decrease of at least half a million in the number of inmates.

More significantly, the bare annual statistics can mask both fluctuations within years and the momentous external events which caused them. Such is the case with 1941. As well as the figures shown in Table 2, a second figure has been released for the population of the Gulag at the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War on 22 June 1941. This figure is 2.3 million, or roughly 400 000 more than at the beginning of the year and 500 000 more than at the end.⁴² A graph drawn simply from the 1 January series of figures would have shown a steady decline in 1941, whereas the mid-year figure reveals a remarkably steep increase and subsequent decline. The reasons behind the 1941 peak in Gulag population are to be found in

both the domestic and the international policy of the Soviet Union. Put simply, the war interrupted a projected build-up of the USSR's forced labour population and delayed it until a figure of around two and a half million was again reached, and this time sustained, in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

In 1951 'The State Plan of the Development of the Economy of the USSR in 1941' was published in the USA. This plan, consisting solely of tables, cannot be used as primary evidence of the number of prisoners in the Gulag, as it gives no specific statistics on this question, and is in any case a plan before the event, not a balance sheet after. It can, however, form a basis for estimating the number of forced labourers in various branches of production, a use to which it was put by Jasny.⁴³ Jasny arrived at a figure of 2.9–3.5 million for the number of prisoners planned in 1941, an estimate remarkable both at the time, for its very low level in comparison with numbers ten times as great which were then common, and now, for its relatively close correlation to the figures recently revealed from the Soviet archives.

The evidence of the 1941 Plan, as assessed by Jasny, shows that the Gulag workforce was to make a significant contribution to the national economy. There is some evidence that Jasny's methodology produced figures which perhaps erred on the low side.⁴⁴ Taking into account the sharp rise in the Gulag population up to June 1941, to insert Jasny's figure of around three million into the series as the planned total for the end of that year is to create a feasible and certainly not absurd scenario for the camps had not Operation Barbarossa intervened.

Further trends consistent with a large projected increase in forced labour can be seen in one of the methods which was intended to tighten workplace discipline, and yet also had the effect of enlarging the *zek* fraternity of the USSR considerably. On 26 June 1940 a decree on the switch to a seven-day working week introduced harsh new laws on absenteeism and tardiness. To arrive at work 21 minutes late became a criminal offence. By 1 January 1941 28 995 people had been sent to the Gulag under this decree alone, and further decrees on desertion (under which over 15 000 servicemen had been sentenced to between five and ten years corrective labour by February 1941), absenteeism in defence industries, and absenteeism in educational institutes were introduced by the end of 1940.⁴⁵ Clearly no reduction in the amount of forced labour was envisaged in 1941, and indeed it is surely equally clear that a substantial increase was sought.

The final factor behind the rapid rise in the camp population in the first half of 1941 was the occupation of new territories by the USSR. Eastern Poland, the Baltics, Western Ukraine, Western Belorussia, part of Moldavia and Bukovina all contained people who, in the eyes of the Soviet authorities, were ripe for arrest and deportation. Here there existed a bourgeoisie, intelligentsia, priesthood, etc., not yet subjected to the 'red terror' which their Soviet counterparts had already suffered, having been part of the USSR for over two decades. Swianiewicz states that at least three-quarters of a million such people became inmates of forced labour camps; an estimate which does not fit with the new data here considered but more than accounts for the rise of the Gulag population to 2.3 million by the middle of 1941.

The other side of the June peak, the decline down to 1.78 million by the end of

the year requires less illumination. With the onset of war and the seemingly unstoppable progress of the German army, more men were needed in the Red Army. Therefore, in accordance with the decrees of 12 July and 24 November 1941, 420 000 men were granted early release. In all during the war, some 975 000 left the camps to join the armed forces.⁴⁶

Conditions

Living standards

The new information which has been revealed about the Gulag in recent years does not solely concern population figures, but also deals with conditions in the camps, the demographic details of the inmates and, as noted above, the contribution of the camp system to the economy of the USSR. In using the new revelations to assess the role of the Gulag in wartime, the discrepancies pointed out above provide a cautionary note. For many of the matters under discussion though, these are the only detailed and relatively systematic data available. Furthermore, not all of the numerical defects observed earlier relate to the issues discussed here. The statistics, for example, on the number of arrests under the 1940 labour laws, and on the living conditions within the Gulag itself, would apply regardless of the total number of inmates. Similarly, the argument that the war averted a projected upsurge in the population of the camps in the early 1940s still stands, as it is based primarily on the rate of increase rather than the overall total in the Gulag system.

As can be seen from Table 5, the death rate in the camps was very high indeed. The marked difference between rural and urban death rates may be put down to poorer hygiene and nutrition in the towns. The far higher figures for the camps reflect the degree of difference between the welfare of even city dwellers in comparison with the difficult working and living conditions of Gulag inmates, which also worsened markedly during the war. Even before the war, low food norms hampered the completion of the work which the authorities had planned for forced labour, and in fact the supply of food only reached about 67–70% of the stated norm.⁴⁷ During the war food norms were lowered further, and supply disrupted still more.⁴⁸ Only in 1944 was the nominal allocation of food per prisoner increased slightly.

When the German invasion was launched, the evacuation of industry to the East involved much of the Gulag, with 27 camps and 210 colonies (a total of 750 000 prisoners) on the move. The demands which the war was making on the transport system meant that many of the forced labourers were made to complete their evacuation on foot. Furthermore, the movement of inmates led to overcrowding in those eastern camps which took them in; in 1942 the average living space per prisoner was 1 m², rising to 1.8 m² by the end of the war.⁴⁹

Despite the difficulties outlined above, the Gulag made a contribution to the Soviet war economy which has been eulogised in recent literature. Gorbachev's address on the 45th anniversary of victory referred to those who, 'despite their own tragic fate, not sparing themselves . . . worked for Victory', and Zemskov has written of camps 'packed full of people dedicated to the Communist Party and

TABLE 5
DEATH RATES, 1937-45 (PER '000)

Year	In Gulag camps	Nationwide	In Siberia	
			Urban	Rural
1937	30.9	—	—	—
1938	90.9	—	—	—
1939	38.3	—	—	—
1940	34.7	18	—	—
1941	67.3	21	24.1	19.7
1942	175.8	24	29.6	21.3
1943	169.7	—	27.2	13.6
1944	91.8	—	17.3	10.6
1945	61.3	9	12.2	7.4

Sources: Barber & Harrison, p. 88; Zemskov, 'Arhipelag . . .', p. 7. Camp figures do not include Gulag colonies.

Soviet power, who during the war . . . asked to defend the Motherland, and the ideals of the October revolution and socialism'.⁵⁰

Productivity

The Gulag had come into being as an instrument of isolation for criminals and counter-revolutionaries but quickly became an important branch of the country's economy, without which the centrally planned industrialisation of eastern and northern regions would have been practically impossible.⁵¹ At a meeting of the Praesidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on 25 August 1938, the question of the early release of those labour camp prisoners who had worked exceptionally well was considered. Stalin, whilst recognising the desirability of some sort of 'reward' for such inmates, was reluctant actually to release his best workers, remarking that, 'from the point of view of the state economy, it would be a bad thing . . . we'll be left with the worst ones'.⁵²

The productivity of the camp inmates was of course affected by the heightened difficulties of camp life during the war. Alongside these increased hardships in the already harsh life of the camps, the output expected per day worked was raised from 9.5 rubles in 1941 to 21 rubles by 1944.⁵³ These figures for work-day norms during the war are, however, undermined somewhat by further discrepant data from the core source group for the annual output per worker. This reportedly rose from 5600 rubles in 1940 to 10 500 rubles in 1944.⁵⁴ The work-day norms previously cited, however, suggest that, even if the inmates fulfilled the expected norm each day, and worked every day of the year, annual output per worker would have reached no more than 3468 rubles and 7665 rubles respectively in 1941 and 1944.

All prisoners had to work, except for invalids and those deemed unfit for labour. Of the latter there were some 73 000 in 1940, or 4.4% of the Gulag population. No similar figures have been released for the war period itself, but it is generally accepted that the number of prisoners exempt from work was minimised by both

the unwillingness of the authorities to classify inmates as unfit for work and the fact that the starvation rations given to those not working meant that prisoners would often work on whatever their physical condition. The output of the Gulag inmates on average per worker was also no doubt lessened somewhat during the war by the growth in the proportion of female and under-age prisoners. In 1941 women made up only 7% of the inmates, a figure which had risen to 26% by July 1944. The relative number of minors in the Gulag was far less significant statistically, but nonetheless showed an increase from 0.22% in 1942 to 1.05% in 1944.⁵⁵

The greater part of the Gulag effort within the war economy was in activities under the direct control of the NKVD. In 1940 the NKVD fulfilled 13% of the volume of capital work in the Soviet economy,⁵⁶ and between 1941 and 1944 a total of over two million prisoners were involved in NKVD supervised construction.⁵⁷ Out of this number, the majority were divided between the sectors outlined in Table 6.

TABLE 6

GULAG PRISONERS IN NKVD CONSTRUCTION
WORK DURING THE FIRST THREE YEARS OF THE
WAR

Railways	448 000
Timber	320 000
Industrial construction	310 000
Aerodrome and road construction	268 000
Construction of defensive lines	200 000
Mining and smelting	171 000

Source: Zemskov, *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, 6, 1991, p. 25.

As well as the work carried out under the auspices of the NKVD, Gulag workers were also put to work for other *narkomaty*, and from the beginning of the war to the end of 1944 the NKVD contributed about three billion rubles to state funds, received from other *narkomaty* for the use of forced labour;⁵⁸ this is, however, only 0.5% of total government revenue over the same period.⁵⁹ By mid-1944 some 225 000 Gulag inmates were involved in this work, including 40 000 in metallurgical production, 39 000 manufacturing arms and ammunition, 20 000 in the aviation and tank industries, 15 000 in the coal and oil

TABLE 7

TYPES OF WORK PERFORMED BY GULAG
INMATES FOR OTHER NARKOMATY (%)

Construction	34
Logging and loading	30
Production	25
Mining	11

Source: Zemskov, *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, 6, 1991, p. 25.

industries, 10 000 in the electrical industry and 10 000 in timber production. The type of work which these prisoners carried out was largely semi-skilled and unskilled physical labour.

Conclusions

The Soviet Union around the outbreak of World War II had a vast system of forced labour, involving the imprisonment, exile and forced migration of millions of victims. The information recently revealed from the archives of the former Soviet state is at last bringing about an in-depth study of the Gulag in the land where it thrived. By this very fact, light is shed on the organisation, conditions and extent of the system. However, whether the new data are sufficiently detailed and unimpeachable to end debate on the question of either their reliability or completeness remains an open question.

The arguments in favour of the archive revelations' worth are strong. The possibility of their being a recent fabrication is virtually inconceivable, as several scholars have worked from them, and in any case the atmosphere of *glasnost* prevailing in the last years of the Soviet Union militates against a convincing motive for such subterfuge. Therefore, genuine secret state documents of the era are being dealt with. It may be supposed that the authorities wished to have the correct facts available to them, and hence sought to ensure that the reported figures were reliable and comprehensive. Many of the data, notably with regard to the labour settlers, sub-divide the numbers involved in terms of gender, age, nationality, offence of which they were convicted and geographical location. The various types of forced labour and definitions of categories also serve to increase knowledge in a previously sketchy area.

Discrepancies, omissions and matters arising are of course to be expected. The enumeration of such a mass of people over a number of years and across the entire Soviet Union is itself inherently problematic; and even more so in a system prone to the falsification of statistics, from the level of a farm's harvest to a census of the entire Union's population. Contradictions identified within the archival data undermine the supposition that the authorities would ensure the existence of a genuine and complete record of Gulag population, as does the apparent lack of precision in the categorisation of the number of *trudposelentsy* included in the NKVD *spetskontingent* of 1937.

An accurate assessment of the extent of the Gulag labour force around the war years also enhances our knowledge of the Soviet war economy. War makes demands on the human resources of any nation, even one the size of the USSR. Therefore, the demand for workers and soldiers to contribute to the war effort is reflected in the decline of the camp population on the outbreak of war. Nonetheless, the continuation of a large number of people in forced labour raises questions about the Soviet authorities' use of human resources in wartime. The camp and colony totals of the core source group during World War II amount to around 7.5% of the number of soldiers and war workers, and over 2.5% of all workers and soldiers put together.⁶⁰ It appears to be the case that to the camp and colony figures must be added a proportion of the *trudposelentsy*, as these were to a significant

degree classed as part of the NKVD contingent, at least at the end of the 1930s. Also to be allocated to the available manpower resources at the end of the war are those imprisoned as part of the filtration and verification process, the group to which the term *spetskontingent* later applied.

Death rates in remote camps, colonies and settlements imply that those confined there were to some extent expendable. If the proportion of the working population in such places was even as high as that deduced from the camp and colony figures—though there is good reason to suggest, as outlined above, that it was still higher—then there must have been some perceived logic behind this policy. Undoubtedly a political motive played a role in the building up of the camps, and also in their maintenance during the war. However, the war saw political stances on hold when set against the overwhelming need for victory. Therefore, the forced labour population must have had a predominantly economic role to play in the war effort. The new data underline this fact, giving details of the involvement of the NKVD in a variety of production and construction tasks. In terms of an overall picture though, the new figures still leave the contribution of forced labour to the economy of the USSR a little sketchy. The total output of the NKVD contingent in its key areas of activity is unavailable, and there are inconsistencies in the figures for total capital work and output per worker from recent sources.

The human suffering involved in the Gulag system cannot be quantified. It came from both the emotional agonies of split families, relocation and the death of loved ones, and from the physical hardships which sprang from the living condition of forced labourers. Such matters have been the subject of recollection from those who came out alive. In the new information available from the archives, accounts give way to accounting. These data, though perhaps seeming impersonal, are a valuable addition to the historian's understanding of forced labour in the Soviet Union. A careful assessment of the new revelations will provide a statistical underpinning of benefit to the understanding of a variety of matters in the history of the Stalin era.

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APPENDIX

DEFINITIONS⁶¹

<i>spetskontingent</i>	a term used to define a category of the population in the compilation of the census. There is some debate over the categories of inmate, settler and NKVD staff included (see text). In the war period the meaning of the term was altered, and those sent to 'verification and filtration camps' formed what then became termed the <i>spetskontingent</i> .
<i>spetspereselenets</i> <i>trudposelenets</i> <i>spetsposelenets</i>	these terms are synonymous; <i>spetspereselenets</i> was the term employed before 1934, <i>trudposelenets</i> was used between 1934 and 1944, and from 1944 onwards <i>spetsposelenets</i> was the official term. These were people sent to labour settlements, i.e. to a specified location and work, <i>sine die</i> , with no right to leave nor vote, and no passport. They were required to report regularly to the authorities.

<i>ssyl'noposelenets</i>	convict exiled <i>sine die</i> , but allowed to live at liberty in a restricted area.
<i>ssyl'nyi</i>	an exile (<i>ssylka</i> —exile as a state). Told where to live, for a specified term, with no right to work. Receives state benefit.
<i>vysyl'nyi</i>	an exile (<i>vysylka</i> —exile as a state). Told where not to live, and is otherwise free.
<i>zaklyuchennyi</i>	a prisoner.
<i>zek</i>	an abbreviation of <i>zaklyuchennyi</i> .

Note: There also existed a category of forced labour without confinement. This was served for a fixed period of time, usually in the normal place of work of the person so sentenced, and with a reduction in wages.

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¹ The term 'core source group' refers to the group of scholars all evidently using the same information, with tables of figures being interchangeable between their articles. The leading names within this category are Zemskov, Dugin and Malygin.

² For a summary of definitions see Appendix.

³ V. N. Zemskov, 'Arkhipelag Gulag: glazami pisatelya i statistika', *Argumenty i fakty*, 45, 1989, pp. 6–7.

⁴ A. N. Dugin, 'Gulag: Otkryvaya arkhivy', *Na boevom postu* (Moscow), 27 December 1989; A. N. Dugin, 'Gulag glazami istorika', *Soyuz*, 9, 1990; A. N. Dugin & A. Ya. Malygin, 'Solzhenitsyn, Rybakov: tekhnologiya lzhi', *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 7, 1991; V. N. Zemskov, 'Zaklyuchennyye, spetsposelentsy, ssyl'noposelentsy, ssyl'nye i vyslannyye', *Istoriya SSSR*, 5, 1991; V. N. Zemskov, 'Arkhiy nachinayut govorit'—Gulag (istoriko-sotsiologicheskii aspekt)', *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, 6, 1991.

⁵ Alec Nove, 'How Many Victims in the 1930s?', *Soviet Studies*, 42, 4, 1990, p. 813.

⁶ V. N. Zemskov, 'Ob uchete spetskontingenta NKVD vo vsesoyuznykh perepisyakh naseleniya 1937 i 1939', *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, 2, 1991, p. 75.

⁷ Yu. A. Polyakov, V. B. Zhiromskaya & I. N. Kiselev, 'Arkhiy nachinayut govorit': Polveka molchaniya (vsesoyuznaya perepis' naseleniya 1937 g.), *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, 8, 1990, p. 31; S. G. Wheatcroft, 'More Light on the Scale of Repression and Excess Mortality in the Soviet Union in the 1930s', *Soviet Studies*, 42, 2, 1990, p. 367, note 6, adds exiles to the components of the *spetskontingent*, but this addition is not sound in the light of the more recent archival revelations.

⁸ Zemskov, 'Arkhiy nachinayut govorit'—Gulag (istoriko-sotsiologicheskii aspekt), *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, 7, 1991, p. 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4–6.

¹⁰ Dugin & Malygin, p. 69.

¹¹ A. N. Dugin, 'Govoryat arkhivy: neizvestnye stranitsy GULAGA', *Sotsial'no-politicheskie nauki*, 7, 1990, p. 99; Zemskov, 'Zaklyuchennyye . . .', p. 153.

¹² The differences are, considering Zemskov's figures in relation to Dugin's; 1939 + 10 000; 1940 – 1000; 1941 + 23 000; 1942 + 2000; 1943 + 2000; 1944 – 5000; 1945 figures unavailable; 1946 – 22 000; 1947 – 40 000; 1948 + 13 000.

¹³ For 1945 Dugin cites 336 153 and Zemskov cites 336 750; and for 1947 Dugin cites 194 000 and Zemskov cites 194 886. Dugin, 'Govoryat arkhivy . . .', p. 94; Zemskov, 'Arkhipelag . . .', p. 7.

¹⁴ A. N. Dugin, 'Stalinizm: Legendy i fakty', *Slovo* (Moscow), 7, 1990, p. 23.

¹⁵ Dugin, 'Govoryat arkhivy . . .', p. 94; Zemskov, 'Arhipelag . . .', p. 7.

¹⁶ According to Zemskov: 'Arhipelag . . .', p. 7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Dugin, 'Stalinizm . . .', pp. 25–26.

¹⁹ Dugin, 'Govoryat arkhivy . . .', pp. 90–101.

²⁰ Dugin, 'Stalinizm . . .', p. 23.

²¹ Zemskov, 'Zaklyuchennye . . .', p. 151.

²² A. Antonov-Ovseenko, *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 3 April 1991, p. 3. Zemskov has in turn suggested that Antonov-Ovseenko's estimate may have been arrived at by the simple misreading of a document in the archives, whereby a decimal point went unnoticed and the 1945 figure of 1.6 million became 16 million.

²³ Zemskov, 'Zaklyuchennye . . .'.
Data cited as from TsGANKh (Central State Archive of the National Economy).

²⁴ V. V. Tsaplin, 'Statistika zhertv stalinizma v 30-e gody', *Voprosy istorii*, 4, 1989, p. 176.

²⁵ Tsaplin, 'Statistika . . .', p. 176. Incidentally, a figure of 156 million citizens in the 1937 census was quoted by Anton Antonov-Ovseenko in 1980, see *The Time of Stalin* (New York, 1981), p. 207.

²⁶ Zemskov, 'Ob uchete . . .', p. 75.

²⁷ Tsaplin, 'Statistika . . .', p. 176.

²⁸ Wheatcroft, 'More Light . . .', p. 367, note 6.

²⁹ Polyakov *et al.*, 'Arkhivy . . .', pp. 30–52.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 32–35.

³¹ The omission of colonies from this list must again be assumed to be a slip, as colonies are certainly included within the authors' definition of the *spetskontingent* group C.

³² Zemskov, 'Ob uchete . . .', p. 75.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Using the figure derived by Polyakov *et al.* of 1.8 million for the NKVD *spetskontingent* minus camp guards leaves some 800 000 *trudposeletsy* excluded from the *spetskontingent*, out of a total of 916 787 *trudposeletsy* given for 1937. Using Zemskov's 2.2 million figure instead of the 1.8 million leaves around 400 000 excluded. Zemskov, 'Ob uchete . . .', p. 74.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ A. L. Unger, *Constitutional Development in the USSR* (London, 1981), p. 83.

³⁷ Polyakov *et al.*, 'Arkhivy . . .', p. 47.

³⁸ Tsaplin, 'Statistika . . .', p. 176; Polyakov *et al.*, 'Arkhivy . . .', p. 47.

³⁹ Polyakov *et al.* say up to 25% of *spetskontingent* groups B and C were guards; Zemskov says 6%. A figure of 300 000 camp guards would equal 13%.

⁴⁰ Robert Conquest, 'Excess Deaths and Camp Numbers', *Soviet Studies*, 43, 5, 1991, pp. 949–952.

⁴¹ Zemskov, 'Arhipelag . . .', pp. 6–7; Zemskov, *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, 7, 1991, pp. 3ff.

⁴² V. F. Nekrasov, 'Desyat' zheleznykh narkomov', *Komsomolskaya pravda*, 29 September 1989, p. 4; Zemskov, *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, 7, 1991, p. 3; L. Ivashov & A. Emelin (interviewees), 'Gulag v gody velikoi otechestvennoi voiny', *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1, 1991, p. 19.

⁴³ N. Jasny, 'Labour and Output in Soviet Concentration Camps', *Journal of Political Economy*, 59, 5, 1951, pp. 405–419.

⁴⁴ He estimates that the 1941 plan envisaged 1 172 000 camp inmates being involved in construction, whereas *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal* asserts that Gosplan put the number of prisoners to be involved in construction in 1941 at 1 976 000 (Ivashov & Emelin, p. 19). Equally, however, the latter article states that the NKVD carried out 13% of the volume of capital work in the economy in 1940, and that Gosplan assigned to the NKVD the completion of 1.8 billion rubles worth of capital construction in 1941. This latter sum seems untenably low, as the 1941 Plan envisaged 57 billion rubles worth of capital investment (Jasny, 'Labour and Output . . .', p. 409).

⁴⁵ Dugin, 'Gulag glazami istorika . . .', p. 9.

⁴⁶ Zemskov, *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, 6, 1991, p. 24.

⁴⁷ Ivashov & Emelin, p. 18.

⁴⁸ In a camp in northern Russia in winter 1941–42 the daily norms were reportedly: for those fulfilling the work quota, 700 grams of bread, thin soup, and buckwheat; for those deemed to have underworked, 400 grams of bread, and thin soup. D. J. Dallin & B. I. Nikolaevsky, *Forced Labour in Soviet Russia* (London, 1948), p. 10.

⁴⁹ Zemskov, *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, 6, 1991, p. 22.

⁵⁰ Ivashov & Emelin, p. 14; Zemskov, *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, 6, 1991, p. 20.

⁵¹ Zemskov, *op cit.*, p. 21.

⁵² Ivashov & Emelin, p. 14.

⁵³ Zemskov, *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, 6, 1991, p. 21.

⁵⁴ Ivashov & Emelin, p. 22.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵⁷ Between 1941 and 1944 the average number of workers employed per annum in industry has been estimated at 8 736 000 and the average number of workers employed per annum in transport, construction and trade was 7 742 500. Mark Harrison, *New Estimates of Soviet Production and Employment in World War II: A Progress Report*, CREES Discussion Paper, SIPS, University of Birmingham, No. 32, 1991, pp. 62–63.

⁵⁸ Zemskov, *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, 6, 1991, p. 25. The question of NKVD work performed for other bodies was a matter of dispute between Jasny and A. D. Redding, *Journal of Political Economy*, 60, 1952, pp. 337–342. Jasny states that evidence of such work 'would have destroyed my estimates of the number of inmates if the 1941 Plan did not contain evidence which seems to show conclusively that no construction work was done by the NKVD other than that considered in my analysis or that, if it was done, such work occurred only to a small extent'. *Ibid.*, pp. 340–341. Assuming that the 34% of the Gulag inmates involved in construction for other *narkomaty* (Table 7) earned 34% of the 3 billion rubles contributed to state funds from such NKVD work from mid-1941 to the end of 1944, then their contribution was 1.02 billion rubles. Total government revenue for the same period has been put at about 646.5 billion rubles. Mark Harrison, *Soviet Planning in Peace and War 1938–1945* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 149. The annual figure for 1941 has been halved here before summation of 1941–44 figures, to approximate a figure from the beginning of the war. Therefore, the contribution to state funds from NKVD construction work for other *narkomaty* was 0.16% of total government revenue during the war.

⁵⁹ Calculated from government revenue figures in Harrison, *Soviet Planning*, p. 149. The annual figure for 1941 has been halved here before summation of 1941–44 figures, to approximate a figure from the beginning of the war.

⁶⁰ The estimate of Soviet employment 1941–45 used here gives an annual average of 21.55 million soldiers and war workers, and a working population annual average of 61.75 million. John Barber & Mark Harrison, *The Soviet Home Front 1941–1945* (London, 1991), p. 219. The total of the annual camp and colony population figures for 1941–44 is approximately 6 371 000.

⁶¹ The definitions given here have been obtained from various sources (dictionaries, personal conversations, and deductions from articles read). They are presumed to be neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive in their descriptions of the conditions imposed on those so defined (e.g. just because it does not say that a *ssyl'nposelenets* had no passport, it does not mean that he did have one).