

IS THE GULAG ARCHIPELAGO BY ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN AN ACCURATE DEPICTION OF WHAT THE SOVIET UNION WAS LIKE?

No.

His wife told the truth very clearly:

A 2003 [article](#) regarding the death of Solzhenitsyn's wife put it like this:

"In her 1974 memoir, Sanya: My Life with Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn"... she wrote that she was "perplexed" that the West had accepted "The Gulag Archipelago" as "the solemn, ultimate truth," saying its significance had been "overestimated and wrongly appraised."

Pointing out that the book's subtitle is "An Experiment in Literary Investigation," she said that her husband did not regard the work as "historical research, or scientific research."

She contended that it was, rather, a collection of "camp folklore," containing "raw material" which her husband was planning to use in his future productions."

[The Gulag Archipelago shouldn't be taken seriously](#)

Further, Solzhenitsyn was a right wing radical and extremist.

"But there's something else that makes him more complex than just a victim of tyranny and a crusader against it. Once in America and feted by Western leaders, he urged the US to continue bombing Vietnam. He condemned Amnesty International as too liberal, opposed democracy in Russia, and supported General Franco."

[Mark Steel: A reactionary called Solzhenitsyn](#)

The other accounts of the gulags from letters written by prisoners depicts a whole different reality.

"Well-known accounts of Stalin-era labor camps like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's "[Gulag Archipelago](#)" and Gustaw Herling's "[A World Apart](#)" imply, in their very titles, that detention sites were almost entirely cut off from the rest of Soviet society – islands divided from the country's "mainland," or underworlds into which prisoners disappeared, never to be heard from again.

In fact, most Stalin-era labor camp inmates theoretically enjoyed at least some letter-writing privileges. Although rules varied depending on where and when a prisoner was held, often inmates could receive an unlimited amount of correspondence through the official camp mail system (though this was heavily censored).

The amount they could send depended on the crime, with harsher limits for political offenders. In the 1940s, inmates sentenced for political crimes were often limited to sending only two to three letters home per year. But some political prisoners, like Formakov, managed to get around these constraints and send steady streams of letters through a mixture of official and illicit channels."

"In a separate series of letters, Formakov describes the stage shows he performed in as part of a camp cultural brigade. In a letter to his wife dated March 9, 1946, Formakov explained that the sunny

attitudes the inmates who participated in these shows had to assume were often very much at odds with their reality:

“We had a concert on the 8th in honor of International Women’s Day. I served as the emcee... You act as master of ceremonies, make some witty remarks, and then head backstage, release your soul, and you just want to wail... For this reason, I never let it go; my soul is always in a corset.”

In addition to letters on standard lined notebook paper and mass-produced postcards, Formakov sent handmade birthday and Christmas cards. In one case, he carved a special anniversary greeting into birch bark for his wife. He wrote and illustrated short stories for his two children (Dima, five years old at the time of Formakov’s first arrest in July 1940, and Zhenia, born in December 1940). And he decorated the pages of some of the letters he sent with pressed wildflowers.”

[In letters from Stalin's labor camps, a window into Soviet political oppression](#)

“But his letters – both those sent through official channels and those smuggled out – capture many details that rarely figure in the memoirs of labor camp survivors. For instance, in a letter dated August 10, 1944, Formakov describes the surreal experience of going to the camp club to watch the 1941 American musical comedy “[Sun Valley Serenade](#),” which had just been purchased by Soviet authorities and would have been a hot ticket in Moscow. Similarly, in a communication dated Oct. 27, 1947, he references rumors of an impending devaluation of the ruble, which suggests that – despite the Soviet state’s efforts to keep plans for a December 1947 currency reform secret – news had leaked, even to distant labor camps.

Such passages support recent research by scholars [Wilson Bell](#) and [Golfo Alexopolous](#), who have noted that labor camps were far more intertwined with the rest of Soviet society than previously thought.”

Other accounts have also corroborated these facts.

[The Truth about the Soviet Gulag – Surprisingly Revealed by the CIA](#)

““Humanitarian” lies serve to brainwash the population into supporting imperialist wars. Fed by far-right propaganda, and funded by the CIA, the mainstream “news” outlets describe the Soviet labour camps – also known as the “the Gulags” – as Stalin’s means to repress pro-democracy dissidents and to enslave the Soviet masses. However, the same CIA that, through Operation Mockingbird, gave the US military almost-total control over mainstream press in order to foster anti-Soviet disinformation (Tracy 2018), has recently released declassified documents that invalidate the slanders surrounding the Gulags.

The CIA which conducted various anti-Soviet operations for almost five decades, and whose staff strived to obtain accurate intelligence about the USSR, cannot be said to have any bias in favor of the USSR. Therefore, the following declassified CIA files that surprisingly “confess” in favor of the Soviet Union are particularly valuable.”

“The Conditions of the Prisons

A 1957 CIA document titled “Forced Labor Camps in the USSR: Transfer of Prisoners between Camps” reveals the following information about the Soviet Gulag in pages two to six:

1. Until 1952, the prisoners were given a guaranteed amount food, plus extra food for over-fulfillment of quotas
2. From 1952 onward, the Gulag system operated upon “economic accountability” such that the more the prisoners worked, the more they were paid.
3. For over-fulfilling the norms by 105%, one day of sentence was counted as two, thus reducing the time spent in the Gulag by one day.
4. Furthermore, because of the socialist reconstruction post-war, the Soviet government had more funds and so they increased prisoners’ food supplies.
5. Until 1954, the prisoners worked 10 hours per day, whereas the free workers worked 8 hours per day. From 1954 onward, both prisoners and free workers worked 8 hours per day.
6. A CIA study of a sample camp showed that 95% of the prisoners were actual criminals.
7. In 1953, amnesty was given to 70% of the “ordinary criminals” of a sample camp studied by the CIA. Within the next 3 months, most of them were re-arrested for committing new crimes.

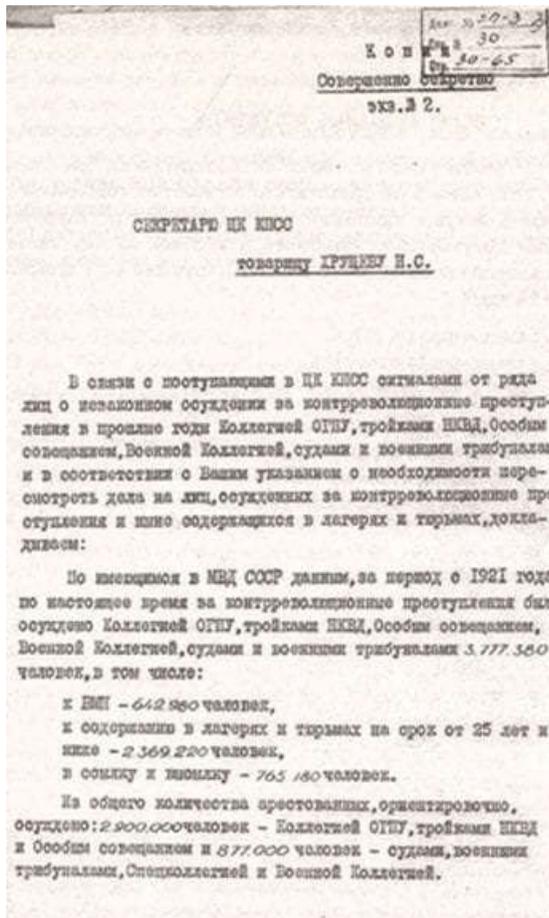
The following are excerpts of the CIA document, underlined and put together for the reader:

10. The 1953 amnesty was for ordinary criminals. Approximately one-half per cent of the prisoners in Ozerlag were released. Up to 70% of the prisoners in Angerlag were released. They were released in one grand sweep, in approximately one week. Within the next three months the majority of them were rearrested for crimes which they had newly committed and returned to Angerlag. 25X1
26. Until 1952 the "guaranteed ration" was distributed to each prisoner, regardless of whether or not he had fulfilled the norm. It consisted of 122 grams of groats, 10 grams of flour, 20 grams of sugar, 75 grams of fish, 10 grams of something made of flour, such as macaroni, 500 grams of potatoes and vegetables, 15 grams of fat, 1½ grams of a coffee substitute, 1.3 grams of tomato sauce, 45 grams of meat, and 650 grams of bread. From this the following meals were derived: breakfast - 700 grams of soup and 200 cc of kasha; dinner - 700 cc of soup and 200 grams of bread; supper 700 cc of soup and 200 cc of kasha. In the evening a portion of fish and 200 grams of bread were handed out. All these food products were of extremely low quality. In addition, it was permitted to substitute some products for others; for example, fish could be substituted for meat, eggs for potatoes, etc.
27. Those prisoners who fulfilled over 100% of the norm were given a supplementary ration. There were several grades, each including 100 grams of bread, 200 cc of kasha, and 5 grams of sugar more than the next lowest one.
28. Beginning with March 1952 the camp was put on a basis of economic accountability (khozraschet), i.e. the prisoners were paid for their work on the basis of a reduced rate of output (po vyrobke po ponizhennoy tarifnoy setke). The quantity of food was increased: everyone was given daily an additional 200 grams of bread, 130 grams of groats, 10 grams of flour products, 30 grams of fat, 20 grams of sugar, 3 grams of tomato puree, 350 grams of potatoes, 500 grams of vegetables, 15 grams of meat, and up to 90 grams of fish. The food improved, but the practice of substituting some products for others remained. Moreover, there always was an inadequate amount of green vegetables and the prisoners all suffered from scurvy.
40. In addition, for overfulfillment of the norm there were the so-called "zachety" (payments). For overfulfilling the norm by 105%, one day of the sentence was counted as two. 25X1
39. The amount of earnings depended on the profession and on the degree of fulfillment of the norms, if there were norms for that particular type of work.
52. The majority of the prisoners, 95% of whom are former criminals, is Russian, the rest is made up of various nationalities of the Soviet Union.

“According to page four of another CIA (1989) document titled “The Soviet Labour System: An Update,” the number of Gulag prisoners “grew to about 2 million” during Stalin’s time.

--Soviet 5-Year Plans made ample use of forced labor
in large construction projects, and the system
grew to about 2 million by the early 1930s.

These figures match Soviet statistics as well, from declassified Soviet archives. The following is a 1954 declassified Soviet archival document (Pyakhov), an excerpt of which is translated into English:



“During the period from 1921 to the present time for counterrevolutionary crimes were convicted 3,777,380 people, including to capital punishment – 642,980 people to the content in the camps and prisons for a period of 25 years old and under – 2,369,220 into exile and expulsion – 765,190 people.

“Of the total number of convicts, approximately convicted: 2,900,000 people – College of OGPU, NKVD and triples Special meeting and 877,000 people – courts by military tribunals, and Spetskollegiev Military Collegium.

“It should be noted... that established by Decree ... on November 3, 1934 Special Meeting of the NKVD which lasted until September 1, 1953 – 442,531 people were convicted, including to capital punishment – 10,101 people to prison – 360,921 people to exile and expulsion (within the country) – 57,539 people and other punishments (offset time in detention, deportation abroad, compulsory treatment) – 3,970 people...

Attorney General R. Rudenko

Interior Minister S. Kruglov

Justice Minister K. Gorshenin”

The Soviet archives remained declassified for decades, only to be released near or after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In addition, after Stalin died, the pro-Stalin head of the NKVD (Soviet interior ministry) Lavrenty Beria had already been executed by Khrushchev, a staunch anti-Stalinist (History in an hour 2010). These facts make it very unlikely that the Soviet intelligence would have a pro-Stalin bias.

The Italian-American historian Michael Parenti (1997, pp. 79-80) further analyzes the data provided from the Soviet archives:

“In 1993, for the first time, several historians gained access to previously secret Soviet police archives and were able to establish well-documented estimates of prison and labor camp populations. They found that the total population of the entire gulag as of January 1939, near the end of the Great Purges, was 2,022,976. At about that time, there began a purge of the purgers, including many intelligence and secret police (NKVD) officials and members of the judiciary and other investigative committees, who were suddenly held responsible for the excesses of the terror despite their protestations of fidelity to the regime.

“Soviet labor camps were not death camps like those the Nazis built across Europe. There was no systematic extermination of inmates, no gas chambers or crematoria to dispose of millions of bodies.... [T]he great majority of gulag inmates survived and eventually returned to society when granted amnesty or when their terms were finished. In any given year, 20 to 40 percent of the inmates were released, according to archive records. Oblivious to these facts, the Moscow correspondent of the New York Times (7/31/96) continues to describe the gulag as ‘the largest system of death camps in modern history’.

“Almost a million gulag prisoners were released during World War II to serve in the military. The archives reveal that more than half of all gulag deaths for the 1934-53 period occurred during the war years (1941-45), mostly from malnutrition, when severe privation was the common lot of the entire Soviet population. (Some 22 million Soviet citizens perished in the war.) In 1944, for instance, the labor-camp death rate was 92 per 1000. By 1953, with the postwar recovery, camp deaths had declined to 3 per 1000.

“Should all gulag inmates be considered innocent victims of Red repression? Contrary to what we have been led to believe, those arrested for political crimes (‘counterrevolutionary offenses’) numbered from 12 to 33 percent of the prison population, varying from year to year. The vast majority of inmates were charged with nonpolitical offenses: murder, assault, theft, banditry, smuggling, swindling, and other violations punishable in any society.”

Thus, according to the CIA, approximately two million people were sent to the Gulag in the 1930s, whereas according to declassified Soviet archives, 2,369,220 up until 1954. When compared to the population of the USSR at the time, as well as the statistics of a country like the United States, the

Gulag percent population in the USSR throughout its history was lower than that of the United States today or since the 1990s. In fact, based on Sousa's (1998) research, there was a larger percentage of prisoners (relative to the whole population) in the US, than there ever was in the USSR:

“In a rather small news item appearing in the newspapers of August 1997, the FLT-AP news agency reported that in the US there had never previously been so many people in the prison system as the 5.5 million held in 1996. This represents an increase of 200,000 people since 1995 and means that the number of criminals in the US equals 2.8% of the adult population. These data are available to all those who are part of the North American department of justice.... The number of convicts in the US today is 3 million higher than the maximum number ever held in the Soviet Union! In the Soviet Union, there was a maximum of 2.4% of the adult population in prison for their crimes – in the US the figure is 2.8% and rising! According to a press release put out by the US department of justice on 18 January 1998, the number of convicts in the US in 1997 rose by 96,100.”

Conclusion

Seeing the USSR as a major ideological challenge, the Western imperial bourgeoisie demonized Stalin and the Soviet Union. Yet after decades of propaganda, declassified archives from both the US and USSR together debunk these anti-Soviet slanders. Worth our attention is the fact that the CIA – a fiercely anti-Soviet source – has published declassified documents debunking the very anti-Soviet myths it promoted and continues to promote in the mainstream media. Together with declassified Soviet archives, the CIA files have demonstrated that the bourgeois press has lied about the Gulags.

Notes

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Source: [The Truth about the Soviet Gulag – Surprisingly Revealed by the CIA](#)