

Robert Conquest dies- but his lies live on!

Recently, the world learned of the death of Robert Conquest, a ‘historian’ and author who worked for the Information Research Department (IRD) – an innocuously-named operation set up by the Labour government to produce and spread influential anti-communist propaganda throughout the British media and arts.

Establishment obituaries have been quick to promote Conquest’s credentials as a *singularly brilliant scholar* who was responsible for revealing the ‘horrors’ of the USSR. They quietly ignore his strong connections with semi-fascist and anti-communist propaganda organisations, and his deeply contentious use of ‘sources’ for his allegations that approach outright academic fraud.

Reproduced below is a statement from renowned Soviet historian Grover Furr on Conquest’s work and legacy, which stresses the importance of understanding biases and motivations behind ‘academic’ works that amount in many cases to ‘propaganda with footnotes’.

Robert Conquest, after Leon Trotsky arguably the chief anti-communist and anti-Stalin propagandist of the 20th century, has died. Naturally, the capitalist media are fawning over him.

A lot could be said about Conquest, but below are some *facts* (I have checked them) concerning Conquest’s most famous book *The Great Terror*.

Robert Conquest has been identified as having worked for the Information Research Department (IRD) from when it was set up until 1956. The IRD (originally called the Communist Information Bureau) was a British foreign office section set up in 1947 [under the Labour government of Clem Attlee] whose main task was to *combat communist influence throughout the world by planting fabricated stories* among politicians, journalists and others in a position to influence public opinion.

A 1978 story in the *Guardian* alleged that Conquest’s work was there to contribute to the so-called ‘black history’ of the Soviet Union – in other words, to fabricate ‘stories’ which were then passed off as ‘fact’ and distributed among journalists and others able to influence public opinion.

After officially leaving the IRD, Conquest continued to write books on lines suggested by the IRD, with Secret Service support. Perhaps his most well-known book, *The Great Terror*, is a universally propagated anti-communist text on the subject of the power struggle that took place in the Soviet Union in 1937. In fact, the book was a re-compilation of articles Conquest had written when working for the secret services.

The Great Terror was finished and published under the supervision, and with the help of, the IRD – at that time the *chief anti-communist propaganda wing of the British political police*. A third of the publication run was bought by the Praeger Press, normally associated with the publication of literature originating from CIA sources.

Conquest’s book was intended for presentation to ‘*useful fools*’, such as university professors and people working in the press, radio and TV. Yet despite this inherently biased and decidedly dodgy provenance, Conquest’s fabrications remain, for most establishment (anti-communist) historians, one of the most important ‘primary sources’ of material on the Soviet Union! [1][2]

In his PhD dissertation (but not in the book that he wrote from it), Arch Getty pointed out that ‘The dominant tendency [in writing the history of the “purges”] has been automatically to believe anything an emigre asserted while automatically denying the truth of everything from the Stalinist side. If one wanted a balanced picture of Tsar Ivan IV (‘The Terrible’), one would not accept at face value the descriptions of the exiled Prince Kurbsky in Poland, during a period of Russo-Polish war. If one wanted a balanced picture of Mao Zedong’s regime in China, one would not accept Chiang

Kai-Shek's version in the early 1950s as essentially reliable. If one were *not* interested in such a view, one would not. The apparent monstrosity of Stalin's crimes and *a generation of Cold War attitudes have contributed to what would be considered sloppy scholarship in any other area of inquiry.*'

Getty also pointed out that Conquest specialised in anti-communist propaganda masquerading as scholarship while working for British intelligence"

'Sometimes, the "scholarship" had been more than simply careless. Recent investigations of British intelligence activities (following in the wake of US post-Watergate revelations), suggest that Robert Conquest, author of the highly influential *Great Terror*, accepted payment from British intelligence agencies for consciously falsifying information about the Soviet Union. Consequently, the works of such an individual can hardly be considered valid scholarly works by his peers in the western academic community. [3]

'In 1980, I interviewed Professor John Hazard of Columbia University, at the time the world expert on Soviet law. Hazard told me that people in the Soviet studies field had told him that British intelligence was still doing Conquest's research for him.

'... Conquest (*The Great Terror*, p754) ... makes the astounding statement that "*Truth can thus only percolate in the form of hearsay*". And, further: "*On political matters basically the best, though not infallible, source is rumour ...*" He believes that the best way to check rumours is to compare them with other rumours – a dubious procedure given the fact that emigres read each other's works. Of course, historians do not accept hearsay and rumour as evidence in any other field of history.' [4]

[We might add a few other areas of anti-communist propaganda, whose evidentiary standard is similarly low: such as the fabrications of north Korean 'defectors' to the south, on whose 'evidence' most of the [cavalcade of bizarre anti-DPRK propaganda](#) is based – RY]

Already in 1979, Getty concluded that 'The point of view adopted here is that the standard interpretations of the "Great Purges", such as those by Fainsod and Conquest, are seriously flawed, cannot account for the available evidence, and are thus no longer tenable.'

A good reply to Conquest's dishonesty is the article by Robert W Thurston, 'On desk-bound parochialism, common-sense perspective, and lousy evidence: A reply to Robert Conquest'. [5]

I don't know of any other scholar officially in the field of Soviet history that has ever dared to attack Conquest head-on in print, in a mainstream journal.

Conquest replied in kind, trashing Thurston's book on the history of the USSR in the 1930s when it was published by Yale University Press in 1996. Thurston's book was by far the best book on this period up to that point and is still the best because he rejects the knee-jerk anti-communist, anti-Stalin line and sticks to the evidence, with only a handful of lapses.

Thurston also published an excellent article showing the dishonesty of the term 'Great Terror' by pointing out that very, very few people were in fact "terrorised". [6]

This article elicited a hostile but very weak response by Conquest, to which Thurston replied with the article about 'lousy evidence' quoted above.

After Conquest's book on the Ukrainian famine, *Harvest of Sorrow* was published in the 1980s, the *anti-communist experts in the Soviet history field universally rejected it*. You can read some quotations from them in the article by Jeff Coplon, 'In search of a Soviet holocaust. A 55-year-old famine feeds the right'. [7]

Of course, there was no deliberate famine. Quite the opposite: Collectivisation put an end to famines in the Russian Ukraine.

Conquest later retracted his view that Stalin had deliberately caused the famine. I have the quotation from him in my book *Blood Lies*.

After my book *Khrushchev Lied* was published in Russia, I was interviewed by *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, a literary-cultural journal. The interviewer asked me some tough questions, which was fine! Part of my reply was about Conquest's book, *The Great Terror*:

'As a graduate student from 1965-69, I opposed the US war in Vietnam. At one point, somebody told me that the Vietnamese communists could not be the 'good guys', because they were all 'Stalinists', and "Stalin had killed millions of innocent people".

'I remembered this remark. It was probably the reason that in the early 1970s I read the first edition of Robert Conquest's book *The Great Terror* when it was published. I was shaken by what I read!

'I should add that I could read the Russian language since I had already been studying Russian literature since high school. So, I studied Conquest's book very carefully. Apparently, no one else had ever done this!

'I discovered Conquest was dishonest in his use of sources. His footnotes did not support his anti-Stalin conclusions! Basically, he used any source that was hostile to Stalin, regardless of whether it was reliable or not.' [8]

Conquest – with the help of the British intelligence service – took the lies about the Stalin period concocted under Khrushchev and by him, added more lies from anti-communist sources in the West like Alexander Orlov and Walter Krivitsky, and presented this as 'history'.

Conquest's works contain lots of footnotes, which are intended to fool the educated but naive reader. But those same footnotes made it possible for me to discover that Conquest used phoney evidence and *never* proved *any* of his anti-communist, anti-Stalin claims.

Twenty-five years later, when Gorbachev took up Khrushchev's anti-communist and anti-Stalin lies, repeated them, and added more lies of his own, Conquest issued a new edition of *The Great Terror* and told everybody: "I was right".

He wasn't 'right'. Gorbachev was simply telling the same kinds of lies, and often the very same lies, about the Stalin period that Khrushchev and his people had told.

– Gover Furr

We commend Grover for his rapid response to the death of Conquest, which we have reproduced above, and encourage all our readers and supporters to take heed of the above words, and study carefully the following excellent books on the subject of Soviet history:

1. [Lies Concerning the History of the Soviet Union](#)
2. [The Ukrainian Famine-Genocide Myth](#)
3. [Perestroika, the Complete Collapse of Revisionism](#)
4. [Trotskyism or Leninism?](#)

References

[1] http://www.fact-index.com/r/ro/robert_conquest.html

[2] This article from the Guardian in 1978 documents the propaganda activities of the IRD:http://www.mariosousa.se/TheGuardianFridayJanuary271978050831_Sida_1.jpghttp://www.mariosousa.se/TheGuardianFridayJanuary271978050831_Sida_2.jpg

[3] Getty, *The Great Purges Reconsidered*, PhD dissertation, Boston College, 1979, p48

[4] Getty, *The Great Purges Reconsidered*, PhD dissertation, Boston College, 1979, p64 note 57

[5] *Slavic Review* Vol 45 No 2 (1986), pp238-244

[6] 'Fear and belief in the USSR's "Great Terror": Response to arrest, 1935-1939', *Slavic Review* Vol 45 No 2 (1986), pp213-234

[7] Village Voice, 12 January 1988, <https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furg/vv.html>

[8] 'The sixty-one untruths of Nikita Khrushchev', https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furg/research/litrossiainterv0608_eng.html