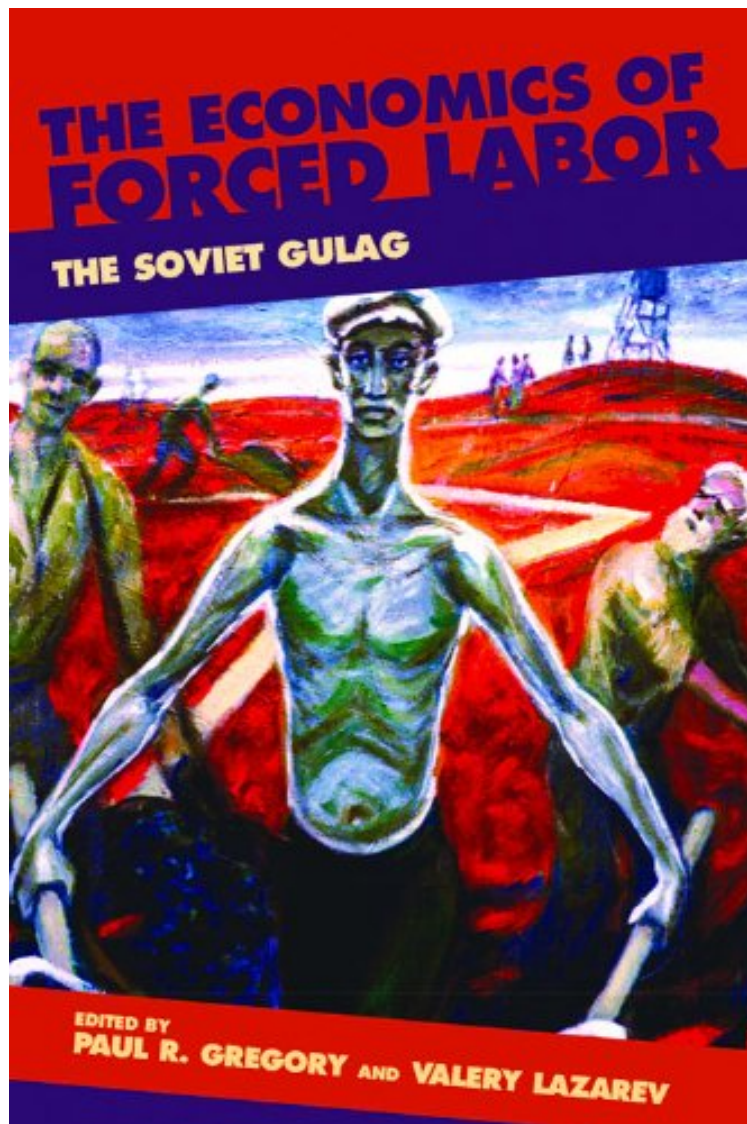


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Paul R. Gregory, Valery Lazarev

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Paul R. Gregory, Valery Lazarev : The Economics of Forced Labor: The Soviet Gulag (Hoover Institution Press Publication) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Economics of Forced Labor: The Soviet Gulag (Hoover Institution Press Publication):

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. An scholarly analysis of the GULAG systemBy NickThis is a

scholarly analysis of the GULAG system, which takes a look at the economics of political repression in Stalin's Soviet Union. In short it is an economic analysis of Stalinism, which is long overdue. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Good but somewhat blinkered

By R. L. Huff

There is a library of Western works dedicated to the rise, operation, and fall of the Soviet prison-industrial complex as known by the official acronym GULAG. Thus, despite Solzhenitsyn's claims, the system had been known and studied in the West from its inception: his revelations were hardly that, even for the general Western public. More recent surveys, such as Anne Applebaum's, are simply rehashing twice-told tales. This particular, relatively slim, book brings together various Western and post-Soviet Russian scholars who examine the system in its purely economic aspect. Its main purpose was to channel labor into remote but resource-rich regions where conventional wage labor was not cost-effective. Soviet penal labor was also instrumental in massive state construction projects, such as the Volga-Don and Baltic-White Sea canals, where local free labor was in short supply for such undertakings. These developments are outlined case-by-case from the early timber camps of Karelia to the ore mines of Norilsk. Although philosophically parallel to Tzarist *katonga*, or hard labor, the system as designed by Stalin was a complement to the emerging Five Year Plan system. It thus bears the same half-relationship to the former as American slavery to the convict lease system of the "New South." Whether the American system served as a model is unknown, but certainly the rise of Gulag under Naftaly Frenkl, a NEP capitalist of the 1920s, points to a similar conceptualization. The authors contend that the GULAG system was therefore not a mere extension of Soviet repression. Beyond that they seem unwilling to connect certain dots: for instance, criminalizing kulaks into convict laborers was not done in other Communist states, the reason being that Czechoslovakia or East Germany did not have a vast, resource-rich hinterland needing to kill two birds with one administrative stone. GULAG was thus not a creation of political repression, producing surplus prisoners for whom productive use must be found. Rather, repressive laws were designed to create a captive labor force already under plan. "Feeding the Gulag" with successive waves of the politically repressed certainly points to its use as a dumping ground, but the original intent was economic, a rationale which finally ended it as too expensive for its limited returns. But the authors seem to over-rationalize the Gulag system in light of market economics. Valery Lazarev in his concluding chapter writes that such rationality should have meant high wages to attract productive free labor. The problem, however, is that the Soviet state budget could not have granted enough carrots-over-sticks to the necessary number: sharing the budget between highly-paid labor and the state administration was as beyond its means as its will. After all, maximizing management's share of the return through the cheapest labor possible has always been the favored route of capital accumulation, in free-market or state-socialist form. (Ask any Wal-Mart worker today.) This is especially true where local labor is non-existent, and holding migrant labor in place for further development is problematic. The Gulag system may have degenerated in Stalin's tenure into a dumping-ground, but the very success of the larger Soviet economy eventually doomed such primitive expedients. As the authors rightly show, the rising costs of a more prosperous Soviet economy made the administration of Gulag not worth its keep. And since released survivors were forced to remain put after their terms in forced exile, a local free labor force was on hand to be used at greater profit. This may have been part of the original intention, and explains why the NKVD, Gulag's parent, was so willing to let it go. The NKVD augmented this free labor via early prisoner release in the postwar construction era demanding more and better-skilled labor. Administrative coercion in the Soviet workplace - except for extraordinary circumstances, like suppressing the mass strike at Novocherkassk in 1962 - had become counterproductive to a skilled-labor economy. The primitiveness of the Russian economy, its devastation by external and civil war, and the "need" of exploitable cheap labor gave rise to the Gulag, not socialism as such. It was often cited as "proof" by Western Marxists of the impossibility of socialism in undeveloped economies. We've also heard these same arguments as to the incompatibility of forced labor with real "free markets." But such primitive exploitation will be used where and whenever those in power find it cost-effective. The reintroduction of prison-industrial labor in the US may in turn be just around our corner.

Until now, there has been little scholarly analysis of the Soviet Gulag as an economic, social, and political institution, primarily owing to a lack of data. This collection presents the results of years of research by Western and Russian scholars. The authors provide both broad overviews and specific case studies.

From the Publisher

Much has been written about the Gulag as an institution of penal slavery inflicted upon millions and as the ultimate symbol of Soviet terror. Until now, however, there has been little scholarly analysis of the Soviet Gulag as an economic, social, and political institution, primarily due to lack of data. This collection, providing both broad overviews and specific case studies, presents the results of years of research by Western and Russian scholars. These expert contributors examine whether the Gulag was created to serve the economic interests of the totalitarian state or was simply a by-product of the dictators consolidation of power. The authors examine the various forms of coercion and the channels through which coerced labor was distributed from the late 1930s to Stalins death in 1953, and reveal why the Gulag emerged and its perceived economic rationale. They detail the chronology of the Gulag from the first major projects such as the White Sea-Baltic Canal and the Norilsk metallurgy complex to later, unfinished plans.

The book reveals how Soviet leadership sought to find the right balance between coercion and material incentives for the labor force and how material incentives played an increasingly greater role in later years. We also learn of the day-to-day costs of maintaining the Gulag and the great hidden cost of coercion: lost productivity and rising criminality. Seen together, these contributions present an extraordinary portrait of a major aspect of the Soviet approach to economic achievement; their results should provide an invaluable lesson to future generations. Paul R. Gregory is Cullen Distinguished Professor of Economics at the University of Houston, a fellow at the Hoover Institution, and a research professor at the German Institute for Economic Research, Berlin. Valery Lazarev is a fellow of the Hoover Institution and is serving as a visiting assistant professor of economics at Yale University. Contributors: Leonid Borodkin, Robert Conquest, Simon Ertz, Paul Gregory, Christopher Joyce, Oleg Khlevnyuk, Valery Lazarev, Mikhail Morukov, David Nordlander, Andrei Sokolov, Aleksei Tikhonov.

About the Author Paul R. Gregory, a Hoover Institution research fellow, holds an endowed professorship in the Department of Economics at the University of Houston, Texas, and is a research professor at the German Institute for Economic Research in Berlin. The holder of a Ph.D. in economics from Harvard University, he is the author or coauthor of twelve books and many articles on economic history, the Soviet economy, transition economies, comparative economics, and economic demography including *Lenin's Brain and Other Tales from the Secret Soviet Archives* (Hoover Institution Press, 2008), *The Political Economy of Stalinism* (2004), *Before Command: The Russian Economy from Emancipation to Stalin* (1994), *Restructuring the Soviet Economic Bureaucracy* (1990, reissued 2006), and *Russian National Income, 1885-1913* (1982, reissued 2005). He has edited *Behind the Façade of Stalin's Command Economy* (2001) and *The Economics of Forced Labor: The Soviet Gulag* (2003), both published by Hoover Institution Press and summarizing his research group's work on the Soviet state and party archives. His publications based on work in the Hoover Institution Archives have been awarded the Hewett Book Prize and the J.M. Montias Prize for the best article in the *Journal of Comparative Economics*. The research of his Hoover Soviet Archives Research Project team is summarized in part in "Allocation under Dictatorship: Research in Stalin's Archive" (coauthored with Hoover fellow Mark Harrison), published in the *Journal of Economic Literature*.